Adventure

May 1st

Published twice a month

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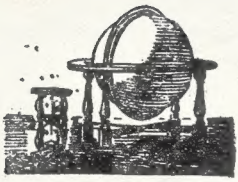
HUGH PENDEXTER
CAPTAIN DINGLE



Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

1927

VOL. LXII No. 4

Arthur Sullivant Hoffman
EDITOR

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

Published twice a month by The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, New York, N. Y., U. S. A. Joseph A. Moore, Chairman of the Board; S. R. Latshaw, President; Levin Rank, Secretary and Treasurer; Arthur Sullivant Hoffman, Editor. Entered as Second Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Brooklyn, New York. Yearly subscription $4.00 in advance. Single copy, Twenty-five Cents. Foreign postage, $2.00 additional. Canadian postage, 75 cents. Trade Mark Registered: Copyright, 1927, by The Butterick Publishing Company in the United States and Great Britain.

Was Beauty's ransom ever so modest?

WE know two cousins, whose names might be Joan and Elsie. Their incomes are equal. Both have long been accustomed to the best that life affords. But Joan's hats, which cost all the way from nothing to five dollars apiece, are always as smart as Elsie's at twenty-five dollars. Joan's complexion, smooth and pink as peach blossoms, happens to cost her only a few cents a week, whereas Elsie positively refuses to tell how many dollars she spends on beauty-treatments, lotions, creams and imported soaps.

Joan's soap, for instance, is just as fine, just as pure, just as gentle as Elsie's costly treasures. White, too, moreover—Joan prefers a white soap because she considers it daintier, and because it leaves no colored stains on her washstand.

Yet this smartly-turned-out soap of hers in its crisp blue wrapping is just as distinctive as her quite sophisticated five-dollar hats. And it costs the enormous sum of five cents!

Its name? Guest Ivory. White, pure, gentle, honest as Ivory has been for nearly half a century. And—with its delicate modeling, its smoothly-rounded edges, its rich cleansing lather—fit for a princess.

Joan always buys three cakes of Guest Ivory at a time, so as to have a fresh cake on hand whenever a princess arrives unexpectedly.

PROCTER & GAMBLE

For the face and hands
As fine as soap can be

Guest
IVORY

5¢

99 44/100% Pure
It Floats

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Advertising section continued in rear of book

FROM THE CAB

By William Rose Benét

YUP, it's all along o' locos I aim for to be,
With the yard-lights shinin' through the rain.
Give the airyplanes the air, let the liners have the sea,
But for me—
A big bull loco and a train.
Ticket-ticket-ticket-tock, hear the little brass key;
Watch your block, watch your block in that tower for me;
On time, on time, roar the wheels that rhyme,
With the rods all blurry and the wind in my face,
And *lookut what a pace, what a pace, what a pace—*
Hear the truck-wheels clicket to the pilot-brace!
O there's many a loco you'd be better if you knew,
All their headlights glarin' down the track;
But a grand old Pacific, yes a 4-6-2,
With her smoke like a blanket on her back—
Say, but boy, what savvy! Stack and sand, bell and dome,
With a long-haul "heavy" watch her hummin' out fer home!
Shake a leg, shake a leg, says the cross-heads to the guides;
Just you try to see them pistons, then you lookut how she rides!
Fire-door's a flash o' lightnin', all her drivers just a blur,
With the racket of the rocket that is all there is of her.
There's the ten-wheel Canuck an' the McIntosh ten,
The biggest that the English knows;
There's the French ones too—hauls the horses and the men—
Yep, there's locos in the Rooshian snows;
There's our Mountain type fer the stiff grade freight,
There's the old American passenger eight—
Right o' way, right o' way—well, that's all I say,
With my bull Pacific just a-rarin' past:
Think yer fast, think yer fast, don't ye dast, don't ye dast,
Yips the steam from our whistle in a witherin' blast.
Well, the boss of a loco, that's enough to be;
Swing me up by the cab hand-grip,
Give the airyplanes the air, let the liners have the sea,
But for me—
A big bull loco on the yip;
And Atlantics—yes, and moguls and mikados may be fine—
But a 4-6-2—that's my *own* enjine.
See, she stands like a mountain, then she snorts like in play,
Then she heaves, then she hollers, then you're fifty miles away;
Yup, an' here we come a-roarin'—yep, an' there we go, a blur,
With the racket of the rocket that is all there is of her—
Yes, *sir!*

When a Sailorman Gives up the Sea Homeward

"HUMPY" ROGERS sat on a hard bench near the shore in the Domain, Sydney, watching a green clipper get her anchor for sea. The clipper's sails were loosed; a tug was at her bows; a couple of shore boats hovered about her glossy green sides, people in them crying farewell to friends aboard; and a crowd of sailors on the forecastle head tramped around the capstan. Their lusty voices rang across the poppling water.

"O, don't you hear the Old Man say,
'Good-by, fare you well, good-by, fare you well?'
We're homeward bound this very day,
Hooraw, my lads, we're homeward bound!

"She's a flash clipper packet and bound for to go—
Good-by, fare you well, good-by, fare you well.
The girls have her towrope, she can not say no;
Hooraw, my lads, we're homeward bound!"

Humpy watched the homeward bounder raise her anchor and follow the tug, her snowy sails falling from the yards, being sheeted home and hoisted to chanteys rapidly growing fainter with distance. In seventy-five days those men would be home, drawing their pay, setting their little neighborhoods alight in true sailor fashion with rum and Rosy, and gin and Jenny, and Polly and porter. Humpy had not been home in twenty years. He wished those green clipper sailors good luck and fair winds; but his scattered old teeth gleamed yellowly in a wry grin as he mumbled the good wishes.

Humpy Rogers had been so long in deepwater ships that he was a good sailor by sheer insinct. He wouldn't have known how to do a bit of sailorizing badly. He had hauled and dragged so many miles of rope through screeching sheaves, fisted and elbowed so many acres of rebellious canvas, grunted and sweated over so many fathoms of stubborn cable, that his shoulders were rounded, his arms hung low like the arms of an ape.

Once he had secured his second mate's ticket; he had made a voyage as second mate; but he had gone no farther ahead. He had gone back. He still treasured that certificate which proved that he had once been something. He had pinned to it the solitary discharge which proved his boast that he once sailed second mate of a tall water ship. And sometimes he would show his treasures to a shipmate. Not often, because not often did he find a friend; but when he did show them he would rub his hard old hands together and grin wryly, showing all his yellow teeth.

And he wanted to go home. For years he had wanted to get back to the scene which he still rather foolishly imagined would be familiar. Not that he had anybody living who cared a scrap about him. When he had somebody, years ago, who did care for a while, he had behaved like many another sailorman at home. His friends could have anything he had; and his wife, glad to have her man home

Bound

By CAPTAIN DINGLE

again, never made the protest she ought to have made. But his wife died of overwork while he was at sea, and his children, reared among strangers, had only vague memories and keen contempt for the parent who came home only once a year and then spent most of his time being a good fellow outside the home.

No, there was nobody at home who would kill any fatted calves for Humpy Rogers. If he arrived in a tall water packet the usual vermin of the docks might give him a grin and a whack on the back and a drink from a black bottle; he was rather too old for the girls to bother much with him, but, the black bottle and the whack on the back and the grin would have to be paid for—oh, very amply.

Still, there was the insistent longing. Home is always home to a sailorman. Sydney in Spring is a pleasant place to be; far more pleasant than dockland at home. The Domain was a gorgeous lounging place, and a man as old as Humpy needed little food. The sun was warm, and the magnificent harbor with all its coves and reaches lay agleam with light and was dotted with moving or anchored craft.

For all of it, Humpy stared after the homeward-bound green clipper with hot eyes, muttering his grievance. He had been given the chance to sail in that ship. He had seen the mate, and there was a vacancy in the forecastle. But when he went to sign on there was a young fellow there also seeking to get home. Humpy had a second mate's ticket, a discharge too, and the berth was his to take. The young man pleaded wife and baby at home—they needed him, he said; and Humpy turned away grumbling but kind-hearted.

The youngster was now sailing home in that fleet green clipper, and Humpy watched her go, muttering, muttering, his teeth uncovered in senile bitterness; for a man had spoken to him in the office, after the clipper's mate had taken the new man off to the quay, and Humpy learned something—

"If you wanted that chance you was a chump not to take it," said the man.

"The lad wants to get home to his wife and baby," Humpy had retorted, and the man had laughed.

"He ain't got no wife! That's 'Hard Luck' Harry. Always got some weepy yarn to spin, he has. If you hadn't been so soft he'd been pinched and in jail by tonight, I betcha. You sailors is proper green when you're ashore, no mistake."

So even when only the trucks of the clipper could be seen over the grass, Humpy Rogers muttered his ideas about Hard Luck Harrys and their deceitful ways. All the world over he had found them, and from none had he learned any lasting lesson.

WHEN Humpy's money was spent there was only one ship in port. "Bound home, ain't you, sir?" he asked the mate of the *Murray*.

"Calcutta first with horses, m'lad; then home I hope."

Humpy grinned and hove his bag aboard the *Murray*. Calcutta—that would be forty days; say sixty days in the river, finding and loading a cargo; and maybe a hundred days home. Two hundred days, say seven months, then home, with a nice bit of wages to take up, so that he could renew old acquaintances in shipshape fashion. When the tug dragged the *Murray* seaward, it was Humpy Rogers who led the tune that helped the topsails aloft:

"A-way down south where I was born,
Oh roll the cotton down!
A-mong them fields of yaller corn,
Oh roll the cotton down!

"Was you ever down in Mobile Bay?
Oh roll the cotton down!
A-screwin' cotton for a dollar a day,
Oh roll the cotton down!"

"That's a good man, Mister," the skipper remarked to the mate.

Humpy couldn't help being good. He was bound home at last, and good spirits came easy. He couldn't help performing his duty like a good sailorman; that was instinctive in him. He looked every inch a stout old shellback, gnarled and knotted, but sturdy and sure-footed still, at the head of the halliards, under the glossy black rigging, his worn old dungarees touched with the bright sunlight and the strong wind making feathers of his gray hair. It was a pretty miscellaneous mob of men who hauled to his chantey, but anybody could have hauled behind him, singing as he sang.

"Oh five dollars a day is a white man's pay,
Oh roll the cotton down!
A dollar a day is a black man's pay,
Oh roll the cotton down!"

The yard was up.

"That's well. Belay that!" roared the mate.

"Belay! Come up behind!" yelped Humpy, and led the gang smartly to the next job of work.

Oh, he was happy! The *Murray* took her pilot for the Hughli in thirty-eight days. He had gained two days. And because she had made a fast passage across from Sydney, the *Murray* got a cargo quickly. She loaded jute, and dropped her Hughli pilot off Sand Heads thirty-five days after entering. Humpy kept a dog-eared log with every day sailed marked therein, for much though he wanted to get home, he never forgot the little matter of wages earned. He kept his twin treasures inside the cover pocket of the book and, all-in-all, that dog-eared, salt-stained old book was about all he had in the world that had any value whatever.

His urge to get home was important, but of no value to anybody but himself. He jotted down the sailing date; then sneaked a look at his treasures. He would have to take his trick at the wheel in half an hour. Seven-bells had just struck. And he'd show 'em how to steer. That old windjammer would never lose a day on a passage through any fault of his steering.

It was a mellow, black night, such as the Bay of Bengal wears as a queen wears a velvet robe. If anything, it was a trifle too mellow. More breeze might have improved it. But the ship slipped easily through the water, and the running lines of foam were like strings of gems against the velvet. One bell struck—the warning bell for the relieving watch—and Humpy put the strap around his log-book. Then voices. Shouts. A smashing impact, and the *Murray* rolled over, cut to the water-line by a shadowy bulk that backed into the darkness and vanished, leaving nothing but a sinking ship and a reek of soft coal smoke. Humpy found himself out in the lee waterways, rolling in water, clutching, as a drowning man a straw, his precious log-book.

The *Murray* sank fast. Her boats had not yet been emptied of harbor trash. Humpy Rogers tumbled over the reeling side before the rush of an empty water-cask that broke away from the top of the forward house. On that he floated. He heard men all around him; nasty sounds; a cry or two. Then there

was just a vast sigh as the tall spars with all their canvas set slid down to the depths and spilled wind as they were submerged. After that, silence, darkness and dread.

HIS yellow teeth all grinning, clutching his log-book, in the pearly dawn of another day Humpy Rogers was picked up by a French bark bound for Noumea, New Caledonia.

There is little to attract a sailorman in Noumea. All Humpy wanted was a passage home. There was a steamer once a month, for Marseilles. There were island schooners, at any old time. Once in a long time a Britisher or American drifted in loaded with prison stores on charter; glad to get away in ballast from the sizzling French convict colony.

At the end of a week Humpy was desperate. He had only the patched, sun- and water-thinned dungarees he was picked up in, and the precious log-book which he hung on to with all the tenacity of a drowning man. There were no ships in Noumea—for a sailorman. There was the mail steamer, once a month. She had no room for a poor beach derelict who knew French only as a heathen language, never seen except in the mad days of his youth in Dunkirk, when a pocketful of money bought him the privilege of ordering a meal from a card printed in a language which required the help of a very willing young waitress to decipher. Those waitresses had been brought up in the atmosphere of ships bound from abroad to Dunkirk for orders, whatever their flag might be.

Humpy had no memories of anything but home. He wanted to ship for home. How he lived during that first week he never knew himself. But when a ship, a steamer, came into port with prison stores, and the news went around that a man had died on the passage and a sailorman was needed, Humpy forgot everything but the need to get home. Steamers he despised. But this steamer was going home, or near home, and that was where he wanted to be.

"Discharges?" snapped the mate of the steamer when Humpy asked for the chance.

"Yes, sir," said Humpy, fumbling with the strap of his log-book. Behind Humpy was a young Frenchman, just out of jail. He wanted to get home, too. Humpy's strap was rusted after the immersion in sea water and was hard to unfasten. The young Frenchman seized the opening, pushed forward, spoke volubly to his fellow countryman in his own language and got the job. Only when mate and man moved away together did Humpy realize his chance was gone; then, still gripping the stained log-book, he shuffled after the youth and assaulted him fiercely from behind.

So intense was the fury of Humpy Rogers that youth proved helpless for once against indignant age. The assault was unprovoked, to any outsider who chanced to see without knowing Humpy's longing for home. The youth just out of prison went steaming home; old Humpy Rogers went into jail. He saw the steamer going out through Little Entrance next morning as he was being driven, among a gang of prisoners, to the dockyard to work. Convicts in Noumea did the repairs needed by French naval vessels.

During blazing days he labored and grinned crookedly. Through sultry nights he lay on his hard bed and tried to fight off the mocking memories that banished sleep. When the wind was high, he could hear the surf pounding. One night a hurricane swept the place, and he heard the crash of destruction outside; the gun of a ship driving ashore; the cries of men. In his grim stone cage he was safe. But he cared nothing for safety. He would gladly exchange places with any man on a ship's deck—even the deck of a ship driving shoreward. There at least was a chance that she might haul clear; and then seaward.

But the storm passed. There was plenty of work for gangs of prisoners then. Humpy was so tired that he slept the next night. But afterward came

the same old memories again to haunt him. He thought back over the years. Since he had last seen home he had sailed in whalers, in blackbirders, in mission schooners.

One voyage he started homeward bound, to be wrecked within a day of home, picked up by an outward-bound ship that landed him up in Vladivostok, about as far from home as it was possible to get in a ship. He had gone sealing from there. The sealer was a poacher, and Humpy got in jail for the first time. It was a Russian jail. A Yankee whaler seemed comfortable after that. He was in the spouter two years; and got drunk and lost his passage when the old blubber-hunter called for wood and water for the run home, a full ship.

Twenty years of those memories. Fellow prisoners, who couldn't understand his language, said he was crazed, because he grinned so incessantly at the harbor and the ships. Who but a crazed one could so constantly grin?

He grinned on the day he was turned loose. By that time the lines about his mouth had sunk so deeply that his grin never left him. And he had acquired a habit of licking his lips, his dry lips, so pitifully drawn back from his scattered yellow teeth. He had no money; nothing but his battered log-book with its jealously cherished treasures of certificate and discharges.

There were no ships in the bay. Hungry and footsore, Humpy was almost tempted to earn another spell of jail, when he came upon a chance which almost turned his grin into something warmer and genuine. An ancient bark, a disused convict ship, was being prepared for the voyage home, to be shown as an exhibit, a relic of departed horrors. *Espérance*, that was the name barely decipherable on the heavy, clumsy stern.

Humpy marched on board. As soon as he saw the aged decks, the rotting gear, the general decay, he felt sure that the job was his. Nobody but a stranded sailorman in desperate straits would want to take a chance in that old coffin. But she was bound toward home. Her name meant hope. He knew that much.

The officer to whom he applied for a berth grinned at him and engaged him. Humpy grinned, and started work at once. Nobody else was on board, except the workmen from shore. Humpy had no dunnage to stow. He offered to stay aboard as permanent watchman, and so earned a little food, a little red wine and a bunk, bedless, but still no harder than his prison cot had been.

On the day that the *Espérance* sailed most of Noumea's population watched her depart and said doleful things. She would never reach home. A decent crew might have a chance to worry her through; but with the street sweepings she was manned with, no. Besides the master and his two mates, who were being well paid for the risk, Humpy Rogers was the only sailorman in the ship. The rest were stranded derelicts, jailbirds, riffraff of the Pacific beaches. But there would be days of fine weather, and they are poor mates indeed who can not lick a gang of men into shape.

Humpy proved his worth and showed his enthusiasm so quickly that before the first nightfall he was unofficial boatswain. He knew no French, and but one man in the crew knew any English. But he could clap a rope into a man's hand in any language; his example, backed by seasonable admonitions from the mates, drove the crew to work. Humpy spent most of his watch below coiling up gear after the sails were set and yards trimmed. But he didn't mind that. He was homeward bound at last.

He made him a pipe with a bit of cane and a chunk of marrow bone plugged at one end. He drew tobacco from the stores, and sat on the forehatch long into the night, wreathed in smoke and exquisite anticipations.

In the morning he led the land-legged crew in the pleasant job of washing down decks. Barefoot in the sun, with the old bark rolling gently down a smooth sea, her threadbare sails full of a warm breeze, and even her decay made less glaring by

the mellow light of early morning, men who lately infested the waterside of France's penal settlement like a plague swished brooms along drenched planks with something like willingness, if not exactly enthusiasm. Humpy drew buckets of water from over the side, and slashed the sparkling brine among the brooms and feet. He was happy at last. Almost the fixed grin relaxed as he splashed here and there, searching out dry spots, singing in a quavery voice just about choking with elation:

"Oh, times were hard and wages low—
Amelia where yo' bound to?
I'm homeward bound, I'm homeward bound,
Across the Western Ocean.

"The land o' promise there yo'll see—
Amelia where yo' bound to?
I'm bound across the Western sea,
To join the Irish army.

"Beware these packet rats I say—
Amelia where yo' bound to?
They'll steal yo're hide and soul away,
Across the Western Ocean."

Weather and winds that favored the old convict ship's racked bones, blew her along placidly toward the Australian coast. The skipper meant to take no more chances than absolutely necessary. No Cape Stiff tussles for him. He favored the Australian coast right around to the Leeuwin; then he meant to take the old passenger sailing route across to the African coast, sneak around the Cape of Good Hope within reach of land, and sight St. Helena, and as much land besides as possible, all the way up the Atlantic.

It was the wise course. That old bark had been built in Moulmein of seasoned teak, a hundred years before, and was as sound in rib and plank as many a new soft wood ship; but somewhere about her was a bit of dry rot, made evident when she got into a southerly buster off Wilson's Promontory and began to leak. It was nothing very serious; the pumps took care of it easily; but land somewhere handy helped the feeling of security so necessary. The leak stopped with the buster that caused it, and thereafter nothing but pleasant breezes and gentle weather accompanied the *Espérance*.

Even the Great Australian Bight failed to live up to its blusterous reputation. The skipper, who had taken the job on contract, began to grumble because he had engaged so many hands to sail the ancient ark home. With weather like that, he could have saved the wages of three men at least.

But Humpy Rogers wasn't bothering his head with such trifles. He lived pretty much to himself simply because he could not converse with his messmates. One young fellow there was who knew a smattering of English, and sometimes he smoked a pipe along with Humpy. As for the rest, they might be plotting mutiny, or his murder, for all Humpy knew.

They were not. In fact, the old bark swam along in an atmosphere of utter tranquillity. The food was better than most of them were used to. There was plenty of it; plenty of tobacco, sour red wine every day and rich old rum every Saturday night at eight bells. Discipline was non-existent. As long as the wheel and lookout were relieved promptly and the ordinary routine work done, neither master nor mates cared much what the men did with their time.

When that southerly buster caught her off Wilson's, the bark was shortened down in clumsy fashion; but Luck was at her stern, looking at her name, and she came through the squall without losing a ropeyarn. The experience was enough to give assurance to the lubberly crowd. Humpy Rogers alone knew how the buntlines, clewlines, and downhauls got into the hands that hauled on them. Only he knew how the topgallantsails were snugged up there in the screaming wind, when helpless men clung to the jackstays in panic.

Humpy didn't mind. He would do six men's work and never let a growl out of him. He was homeward bound, and his ship was *Hope*.

It was useless to perform the usual jobs of seafaring. Long ago the paint had flaked off. There was no brasswork.

The brightwork had been painted brown. The binnacle and wheel boss had a useful coat of whitening over the brass.

There might have been the discontent that always follows idleness at sea but for the terrible condition of all the gear. There was sail-patching every day, in spite of the amazing weather. Humpy was never without a job of long-splicing. Halliards, braces, sheets—all old, some stranded. Nice work for a sailorman. The skipper and mates did most of the sail patching, with inexpert men standing by to thread needles and wax and twist the sail-twine. Humpy had the young Frenchman who spoke English, Arsène, as his permanent helper. Only when the bark steered too badly for green hands did Humpy or Arsène leave their ropes for the wheel.

Those two grew almost intimate. In the easy-going passage across the Indian Ocean, with the bark making a steady hundred miles a day over a sea of unflecked blue, under a sky without a cloudlet, peace hovered over the old convict ship, laying the ghosts that haunted her dark, evil dungeons, making the many voices of her seem like whispers of benign spirits, whereas on setting out they had sounded to uneasy ears like the wailings of tortured souls.

And when, half-way across to the Natal coast, the barrel-built old bark got a fresh slant that piled the sea uproariously at her bluff bows, driving her wallowing along like a fat cow cachalot in a smother of fine weather sprays, and she overhauled and passed a modern iron ship twice her size, Humpy Rogers got on to the rail, flung his canvas cap to the four winds and howled in sheer delight.

He knew, afterward, that the old convict-ship was light, ballasted just for her best sailing, while that big iron ship was like a half-tide rock awash with the burden she bore. He knew, too, that long before the passage was over the iron ship would go ahead again—just as soon as heavier breezes caused the lively old bark to shorten down. But that failed to deaden his jubilation.

> Cheerily, cheerily! Haul and hold.
> See how she goes for a skipper bold!
> Cheerily, cheerily! Rouse the dead!
> See how she buries her lee cathead!

Humpy roared that old song so that men aboard the iron ship heard it. Going home? Why, he could smell the homeland smoke! What mattered all those futile years now?

"The gals got hold o' the towrope now, Arsène!" he cried, as he gathered up his gear for the night.

The young Frenchman smiled, a bit wistfully. In the dogwatch Humpy brought out his old log-book and jotted down the passing of that ship. He showed Arsène his treasured certificate. He bragged a bit, too, as an old man may when things go well.

"I too have something," Arsène said.

He entered the forecastle, and returned with a small canvas package. Not, perhaps, of canvas, either; rather the material looked like the stuff one clothed convicts with. How well old Humpy Rogers knew that! But he said nothing. He only grinned in that yellow-fanged, wry way. Who was he to remind a man of prison clothes?

But Arsène was no hypocrite. Even while he unfolded a little bundle of soiled letters and uncovered a cheap photograph of a pretty little woman with a fine four-year-old boy beside her, he was telling Humpy the story of how he had robbed to buy necessaries for his girl-wife about to have her baby; of how he had never seen his son; of his wife's brave fight to live, and her splendid loyalty to him all the time he was serving his sentence. The innate honesty of the young fellow was plain; Humpy remembered only that other young fellow who pleaded a wife and child and so cheated him out of going home long ago.

"Well, you can't stop me going home now, Arsène," he grinned.

The young Frenchman was too elated himself to care much what the old man meant. He chattered on about his little family until Humpy almost wished he could spin a yarn too. But just to be

going home was enough for him. Let younger men have their wives and their kids. He had had his, and had been just as cocky in his day. He had nobody now. All the same, home was home, and he was getting nearer every day.

JUST once a squall off the coast tore a topgallantsail off the bark. But Agulhas was kind. The Cape had nothing but smiles. Out into the Atlantic the *Espérance* sailed with never a check, never a moment of uneasiness for her crew. When she sighted St. Helena, so confident had the skipper grown that he had the royal-yards sent up and crossed, the royals bent and set.

> Crack on! The Cape's astern and passed.
> From stem to stern she's a-smother with foam.
> Her jib-boom's pointing north at last,
> And she smells her road and follows it home.

Those were the days! Up through the horse latitudes and the doldrums. A few scattered squalls, which did little more than fill the water tanks and bathe the men in luscious fresh water, pushed the bark along faster while they lasted. And there were days of flying-fish weather—good fishing and splendid food. Humpy showed them how to catch bonito; how to cook it; how to eat the rich flesh. Not that they needed much teaching. But he was bubbling over with good will. He had to do something for somebody.

The Western Islands. A dozen ships joined courses there. Wool ships, jute ships, ships with nitrates from Iquiqui, great steel four-posters with grain from Frisco. All slipped ahead of the *Espérance*. Humpy didn't care.

"Good luck, boys! Tell the gals I'm a-coming!" he screamed to a tall clipper racing home for the wool sales.

By nightfall the old convict-bark swam alone on the sea again. But she made her phosphorescent thunder at the bows; her wake was a streak of flame; her head was pointed for home.

That last week Humpy employed all his spare time making a suit of clothes for himself. The mate gave him a pair of moldy shoes, which were easily made presentable with a lump of slush from the galley tub. He had kept bits of canvas from the torn topgallant. A suit of clothes emerged from the scraps. Soaking for a few days in a bucketful of coffee grounds, also given him by the cook, took the canvas color out and gave the suit something of a sporty hue. Humpy grinned as he folded the suit away. It would do until he got ashore. Then he could buy clothes—real dazzling blue, and a red bandanna and yellow shoes, and a varnished pipe with amber mouthpiece, maybe. Or perhaps he'd smoke cigars. Cigars seemed dignified, somehow.

Arsène was busy too. He had collected bones from the galley, and with file and knife had almost completed a dainty model of the *Espérance*. It looked like ivory.

"The little one will be pleased, because it is the ship that brings his daddy home," he smiled, showing the toy to Humpy.

"Here, let me do that r'yal riggin'," growled Humpy, grinning. "You got it too thick an' clumsy, lad."

Humpy put many a finishing touch to the model before it was finally mounted in its box-frame. Always grinning, always singing, always doing something for somebody simply because he was happy. Nothing could stop him getting home now. Already the mates were considering getting the cables up and the anchors shackled on. The deep-sea lead was stopped up in the scuppers forward for two days past. So near home were they that the cook, who had skimped a bit for a month past in fear of possible shortage, again dealt out full fare and plenty.

Then the light. Swift and clear the flash stabbed the dark of a cool evening. There was a haze; the light was seen only twice before the haze concealed it, but it was the light all hands so longed to see. It gave the skipper a necessary check on his position; gave him confidence; sent the watch below to their bunks all full of the morrow.

"That is my home!" Arsène exulted,

flinging a hand toward the light. "To-morrow— Ah!"

"Good for you, lad. My home ain't far away, neither," grinned Humpy. And as he cut up a pipeful of tobacco to induce pleasant dreams, he finished his old song, the song that had lasted most of the passage:

"Cheerily, cheerily! Home at last!
The voyage is over, the danger past.
Cheerily, cheerily! Let out a roar!
Love to you lassies; we're home once more!"

By morning the haze had thickened. There was little breeze.

"Get me a sounding," the skipper said.

The heavy lead was carried forward, the line outside of all rigging, and men held coils of the line at intervals. Humpy had the lead; the second mate took the last coil of line, so that he could read the marks.

"Watch—O, watch!" sang out Humpy, and the lead sogged into the sea.

"Watch—O!" the next man took up the cry, throwing out his coils as the line straightened. So until the second mate felt the lead stop, and hurriedly gathered back the loose line.

"Fifty-two fathom, sand and shell!" he sang out, when the men hauled in the lead. It had not been necessary to back the mainyards. The bark scarcely moved. Somewhere out in the fog a lighthouse siren screamed. That sound was lost about noon. The bells of sailing ships, the whistles of steamers were heard, but nothing came close enough to the *Espérance* to cause uneasiness. Another cast of the lead found fifty fathoms and sand; no shells.

In two hours there was no air stirring. The lead gave a depth of forty-three fathom, mud and broken shell. An hour later, thirty-seven fathom, and blue marl. Somebody said he heard a foghorn ahead. But it was not heard again; and the bark's head swung all around the compass. Still there seemed to be no ground for alarm. A snorting tugboat clattered by somewhere near; that appeared to reassure the skipper.

"Oh well, *hombres*, more days, more dollars," said Humpy, coming below all dripping with fog rime after two hours on lookout.

When day should have died, there was no difference in the opacity of the fog. The bark had a ghostly air, all dripping wet, with long threads of rime, like spider threads, hanging from every yard and stay. On the forecastle-head the lookout pumped dolorous grunts from the foghorn. The mate had cleared away both anchors; the skipper remained on deck, listening with all ears for some sound to guide him. He could not make the bark move in any particular direction, but he lately sensed that a strong tide ran beneath her, and was growing nervous.

"Sound again!" he cried.

"Watch— O, watch!" Humpy sang out, dropping the lead.

"Watch— O!" yelped the next man on the line.

Then the bark struck something hard with her bilge. She rebounded like an empty cask, hurling a man overboard, tangled in the lead line. She struck again, and staggered, heeling over while a rush of tide piled up on her other side, drumming against the hull tremendously now that she did not move before it.

There was a rending of wood. The bark leaned dizzily until the kentledge she was ballasted with carried away and tumbled to leeward. The anchors were let go as soon as it was realized that the ship was fast. Water was rushing into her. Somewhere in the murk a fog signal was heard again—two low-toned notes of a siren. They were heard again after a two-minute interval, and the skipper got panicky. He had the boats cleared away. A hand-lead dropped overside and held in the hand showed that the bark was not moving, yet the tide roared against her weather side, heaping high, sending a quiver through the old hull. And the sails dripped water like rain, hanging flaccid in the windless air.

A boat was lowered. It filled and sank. Like the rest of the ancient fabric, the boats were dried out and worn out. They had never been overhauled, except to see

that they possessed each a plug, oars, ax, water bareca and bread tank.

"Get the other boat over," the skipper said, getting a grip on himself when he no longer heard that ominous fog siren with its two low-toned roars of warning.

Humpy was philosophical. In a dead calm, within sound of a lighthouse siren, he was near enough home to be willing to take his chance for the rest. While men ran here and there, scared at the unusual predicament, Humpy—who had seen many worse—got into his shore suit of coffee-stained canvas with the log-book tucked into its special pocket.

By the time the second boat was swayed over the lee-rail he was there at the falls, ready to lower away. It was a small boat. The shore was near. Some men said the tide was dangerous. No trace of the swamped boat could be seen two minutes after it left the side.

There was no dignity about the master of the *Espérance*. He had brought the old bark home on contract; and the contract said nothing about giving his life with the ship's. It was a gamble. Nobody would insure her. He was well to the front, along with his mates, when the boat was ready. And all piled in. Like animals.

Humpy Rogers cursed them for lubberly landsmen as he held the turn on the cleat. Arsène was as twittery as a cat in water. After so long a waiting, he was all unbalanced in the crisis. Humpy saw that the boat was overladen. The skipper was seated, shouting importantly to the men to get aboard the boat. And the boat's gunwale lipped water under the tremendous drag of the underrunning tide.

"Come on, one of you!" the mate shouted. "We'll come back for the rest. Can't take more than one!"

Four men were at the falls and the painter. Arsène was weeping. Humpy gripped him by the shoulder.

"Tumble in, son. I been twenty year gettin' home. Twenty minutes more won't matter."

"The model—for the little one!" Arsène sobbed. Humpy pushed him over the rail, lower every minute. "I'll get it and bring it ashore when I come," he said. "Hop in."

Arsène hopped. The two men at the painter, crazed at the thought of being left behind, let go the painter, leaped for the boat, fell short and were swirled away. The boat vanished even quicker.

Humpy listened to the sounds, growling all the time about captains and officers who left a man aboard a wreck. Not that it mattered much. They were not sailors anyhow. Not sailors. And in half an hour he would be ashore.

There was a queer feeling to the bark, but he had felt queer feelings before. She was strong enough to stand a couple of hours of such gentle pounding. Humpy went to the forecastle and secured Arsène's model in its little box. The gentle pounding seemed more of a crunching now. But in half an hour—

Humpy felt the bark move. He believed she was afloat. A thought of saving her flashed into his mind. She jerked upright. Struck again. Rolled over the other side. Filled, and was buried under the terriffic rush of the growing tide race that had murdered her.

IN THE morning a fisherman found him. Still clutching in his hands Arsène's model of *Hope* in its box. The fisherman fetched his young wife.

"Ah," she said, "the poor old man! He has a little one for whom he made his pretty ship. Poor one!"

The fisherman found the battered log-book. He got the *padre* to interpret it.

They buried Humpy Rogers in a peaceful little churchyard, with a white stone over him, as became one who had been an officer of the sea. And Arsène, learning that he had been found, came too late to see; but left the little model of the *Espérance* fastened to the headstone with copper rivets, for all the world to see if all the world should pass that way. And all the world, if all the world cared, might know therefrom that Humpy Rogers was home at last.

An Ex-Pugilist and His Joss-House Bout

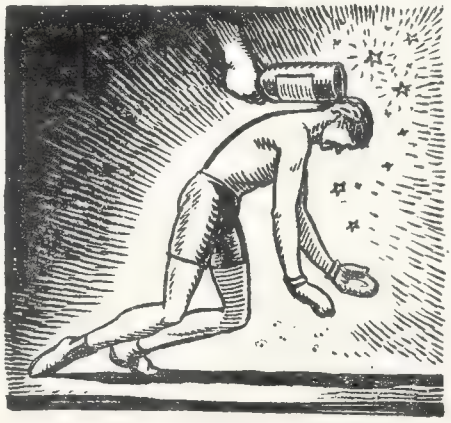
Jim Clancy Shoves Off

By EDWARD L. McKENNA

EVER hear of the Asiatic fleet? It's the toughest part of a tough navy. Originally it came into existence in order that the Celestials might get an idea what the Americans are like and take warning thereby.

Jim Clancy had never heard of it before he became a part of it. As a matter of fact, he had joined the Navy with some vague idea of seeing Europe. He had a girl somewhere in Europe, an American girl, and they had been sweethearts in the heyday of his prosperity, when he fought the Dutchman and the Michigan Terror and even lasted nine rounds with the champion.

After that he began to go bad. The liquor got him and he grew out of his class and his girl left him. He had other fights and other girls, too, probably; then he quarreled with his manager, Terry Robinson, and picked up a new one who wasn't honest—Lou Weingold, his name was. He got Jim into a nasty fixed fight and it just about finished Clancy around New York. So he took to managing himself, and his manager wasn't much good for him. Many's the quiet drink he had with his manager, many's the day his manager didn't make him do his road-work along the sunny Drive or out on the Parkway.



Finally one day he was sitting in Battery Park watching the tugs and a big Ward liner and the Statue of Liberty boat. The next thing you know he was down in Whitehall Street looking for a steamship office, but he never got there. He saw a poster with men sitting on a gun, and men boxing on the deck of a battleship and men watching a girl in a short skirt dancing on the beach. That night he was sleeping in a hammock in the Sands Street barracks of the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

By uneasy stages he reached the Great Lakes Training Station and then Mare Island, out on the Coast. By and by they found him a quaint relic of the Spanish American war to go East in. Torpedo-boat destroyer, the classification was—the *Maxon*. Probably she is still afloat; there's no more reason for scrapping her now than there was the day she was launched.

But the places she staggered into, her plates throbbing till the barnacles fell off of her! Manila, Saigon, Chefoo, Kobe. Through the Eastern Sea, the Yellow Sea, the China Sea. Up to Hong Kong and over to Nagasaki. Plodding along through the unpredictable Far East storms that come up in a minute and last for hours and for days. Poking through the fog and the drizzle. Now, Clancy, don't be

writing your name in the water! Dodging through the fishing fleets with the brown, patched sails. Standing out in the roadstead when the harbors were too shallow even for the draft of the *Maxon*. Crowding in to the jetties among a thousand strange craft; snake boats, flower boats, sampans.

ANCHOR watch tonight—Adams, Boyd, Clancy, Disbrow.

Shift that fender, Jim. She's scrunching against the wharf, knock all the paint off of her. What do you say, sailor?

Sooner be out in the stream; don't smell so bad. Like to be ashore tonight—

That's the old story with all the sailors. Go ashore. It's another town, you see, or even if it's an old one, there's no telling what may happen to you there. Chinky towns with walls, and dragons on the gate, where a round American dollar will buy strange liquor and strange pleasures. Maybe that's the place you're looking for, sailor—the place that called to you out of the spring night when you were eighteen years old. Maybe the woman you're looking for is there, the one you've always been looking for. You thought you heard her voice a thousand times but it wasn't hers. You can't tell. Maybe that old blind guy with the flute on the joss-house steps has a ring or a lamp or something, and you can rub it and you'll get a pile of jack, and there'll be an end of your hunting forever.

What do you say, sailor? All but six on the top of a hill; don't need no bugler. Gee, Clancy, ain't you ever gonna get that fender so she's right? She goes scrunch, scrunch, alla time. If that guard-rail gets busted the Old Man won't give us no liberty at all.

But the Old Man gives them forty-eight hours' leave, all the same.

The liberty party scurries about below; shaving, polishing shoes, looking for clean undershirts with prayer in their hearts. What d'ya say, Jim? Coming with us? Jim shakes his head.

He's too old for these boys—thirty-two, he says he is. Doesn't quite know, really. Doesn't know when his birthday is. Raised in an orphan asylum—St. John's Orphan Asylum in Baltimore. His mother left him there and never came back to see him. It's her name, Clancy, not his father's. He'd never tell you any of this, and certain words are fighting words to him even more certainly than they'd be to those to whom the words couldn't possibly apply.

At last the party is lined up and inspected and bidden to depart. They scramble along the string-piece. Cripes, what a night! Raining, raining, all the time raining in this two-syllable country! Yellow-skinned *souteneurs* sidle by them. You come with me, sailor. Plenty liquor, plenty girl. Some of them go.

Come on with us, Jim. But he grins and shakes his head. He knows where he's going and he's going there by himself. To Yo San's. Yes, one of those places. Rickishaw, rickishaw? No—no rickishaw. It isn't far.

Past the street with the cosmetic shops and the brooms, and the shell goods and the fried bananas. The horn lanterns above the barrows glisten sadly through the gloom. Brr! but it's cold here in the rain. No wonder these Chinks keep moving. *Patapat* of running feet and *flic-flic-flic* of sandals. Turn here now. Here's the street with the five theaters. Fiddles whining and the high, stabbing laughter of girls behind the lattices.

HELLO, Yo San. Yes, it's me. No, not now, Yo San. Liquor, you savvy? No, not sake. Whisky soda, only no soda. Whisky.

He is brought into a little paneled room, very clean, with cushions on the floor and a tabouret and a fire-pot—a small caldron with charcoal in it, heaped to a glowing cone. Yo San leaves him and he crouches over the fire. Presently a girl servant appears with a bottle of Black and White and a plate of oranges and melon-seeds. She brings him a kimono. Grunting, he slips out of his jumper and into the loose robe while she waits with

the Japanese equivalent for dimpling demureness. He scowls at her. Beat it, see? She beats it.

A drink. Ahh. It's not rye but it's something, anyhow. Two drinks. Three drinks.

Nice place here, Yo San's. Nice and quiet. It's early yet, anyway. Good eats here, too. Could have et here, but what do you say, sailor? Save your jack and buy liquor. Gonna give Yo San a nice present.

'S not a bad life, the Navy. 'S no Sunday school, but 's all right. Kinda tiresome, though.

Four drinks. Five drinks. He reaches for tobacco. Blame these kimonos! A little uncertainly he gets up and fumbles in his blouse for a package of Bull Durham and the papers.

'S a funny place, the East. Stay here all my life. Buy my way out of the Navy. Buy my outfit for sixty dollars. Then go up to Canton. No. First, win championship of the fleet. That's it. Heavyweight champion A-si-atic Fleet. That's a title, that is. Gettin' in good shape. Little fat but most of it's muscle. Won't go to Canton, though. Macao. That's a place, Macao. Gamble, gamble, alla time gamble. And drink. Say, that's an idea. Better have 'nother drink right now.

Gees, I can't do that. I can't stay here. I gotta go Europe. Go Europe and find my girl. My girl, Yvonne, and say to her, Yvonne, 's all right. You left me, but 's all right. You marry me and you'll be great singer, great singer. And me? Why, Yvonne, I'm the champ. The Champion of the World. Yessir, I beat the Big Boy. One round in Yo San's in Singapore, it was—no, not Singapore—Nagasaki—Yokohama, I don't know where it was. Anyway, in Yo San's. He brought your name into it and I said to him, You Saturday night fighter, leave my girl's name out of this and bang—the old Mary Ann to the whiskers.

Gees, must have been a short quart, that one. Must 'a' spilt some— 'S funny, I don't remember spillin' none. Oh, yeah —yeah, I must 'a' spilt it. Sure, I spilt it; I remember now. Never mind—

He claps his hands and the servant reappears.

'Nother—'nother bottle. Say, listen here, you got any rye? Ah, gee, you don't understand me. Nobody understands me. Go on, like a good girl, get it. No. Go an and get it. Listen, you're a nice girl and I'll give you a dollar, American dollar, here. Only I don't want you, see? I got a girl of my own. She's in Europe. I don't say I been straight to her all the time, see? I get lonesome sometimes—She's a great singer. You ought to hear her sing—La-la-la—la-la-la—I sing it good, don't I? I could have been singer, too; it means "Ever since the day I gave myself to you." That's me and my girl, see? —my girl Yvonne. I heard her singing it in a Fourteenth Street dive, see? Fourteenth Street and Eighth Avenue, in the old days. It's out of some opera. She sang another one, the first night I come in—"She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps." Only I don't want to sing that one, it's too sad, about the dame's guy dying and all.

Gees, that was the night I beat the Englishman at the Garden. St. Patrick's night, too—a fine night for an Englishman. Up went Mary Ann when I find my foot is touching his foot, and over he goes. Don't get worried, lady, 's all right. I wouldn't hurt you for the world. I was only showing you, see?

Yes, ma'am, that was the night I met my girl, my girl, Yvonne. Funny name, ain't it? What's your name? But she left me. Listen. Tomorrow I buy my way out of the Navy. Sixty dollars. Then I go to Europe on a P & O boat and find my girl. My girl, Yvonne, see?

WHEN the servant comes back Jim Clancy has fallen back on the cushions, asleep. She puts the bottle back and glances down at him inscrutably and leaves him. No, she doesn't rob him. Yo San's has its standards. They might charge him for the other bottle, of course.

WHOA, listen! What's that noise? Cut it out, will you? Here I am trying to cork off a couple of hours. Whoa, listen. Pipe down, will you, and let a guy sleep.

Gees, it's a funny noise. Rumble, rumble, like anchor chain, only louder. Better get up, see what it is. Gees, there's a house fell down and this one is shaking. I better get out of here. I better go *now*. Hey, Yo San! Yo San! Here 's fi' dollar bill for you. I'll leave it here.

Out into the street. Débris and rubble and screaming coolies. Better get out of here. Back to the ship. Hey, look at that! That's a fire, that's what it is. Hear that yelling. That's women yelling in there. Come on, that's women, I tell you. Come on, who's going with me and put that fire out? Can't you hear? Ah, you yellow bums, come on. All right, stay there.

In through the smoke. Quite a famous place. Worse than Margie's over in Port Said, so they say, but they always say that after a place is gone.

In here. Ah! Come on, kid, I got you. Put your arms around me now. I'll carry you like you was a kid. That's right. Let's go.

Bang! One, two, three, four— Gees, what a right this guy has got! 'S worse than the Champ—worse'n the Big Boy! I better take a count. No, I never take no count and I won't for you. Get up and sock him, that's what.

Bang. One, two, three, four— Gees, I wish I could see this bird. This baby is tough, believe me. Hear that yellin'. They're yellin' to him to finish me. Yah! Clancy. I'm Clancy—Jim Clancy. I don't know who you are but you're a yellow bum. Come on, I'll make you like it. I can't see you, and I don't know who you are, I got something in my arms and I can't let go, but I'll get you.

Crash! One, two, three, four, five, six—

Ow! Knocked me down with a kidney-punch. Can you feature that? This guy is good, he's too good. Get up, Jim. Get up. Go on, get up. You got to get up. Won't that bell ever ring? I'm fighting this guy for an hour! I can't see nothing, my back hurts from that kidney punch. If I can only get up and stall till the bell.

Gees! Look! Look! There's Terry Robinson! Terry, yo, Terry! They told me you got bumped off. Look at him there, rippin' his arms up like he was shadow boxin' and hollering. Hollering to me to get up and finish him. Hey, Terry, here I come and I'll knock him in your lap. Up, Mary Ann, once, one time. Hi! There he goes, Terry, there he goes—

Then the bell.

Oh, yes, it's the bell, all right. *Clang, clang, clang,* it goes. It's coming up the street. It's coming this way, and scattering the screaming natives to both sides of it. And the French doctor who was sitting behind the bell was there at the finish. He's talking it over now at the Legations Club with some limey officer.

Captain, I want to ask you about a certain expression I heard yesterday. Busy day, yesterday—these little earthquakes in this region, they break the monotony. There was a sailor, an American sailor. He was in that place, you know, in the quarter. Well. Fire broke out there—he was drunk, evidently. Badly smashed up, a broken back from the rafters. We got the ambulance over there with some difficulty. We picked him up, together with a woman, a native woman, his partner, one presumes. When we got to them, they were out in the street; he was crawling along and the woman shrieking in pidgin and Chinese, trying to loose his hold of her. Oh, yes, nothing serious, a few bruises—back at her old trade in a week, no doubt. But this is what he was saying, besides a great deal of profanity and so on. Bet my end, he was shouting. Bet my end. All the time, up to his death. What is it—some vulgarity? Slang?

"No, Doctor. It's a sporting expression. He was offering to bet his share of a purse of some kind."

"I see. I must remember that—bet my end. He was a big fellow, very fat and stupid-looking."

The Solitude That Tests Men

Sanctuary

By

STEWART ROBERTSON

THE ebb tide of business sucked Simon Mangel from his stool and spewed him into Nassau Street to fight the evening battle in the subway, but tonight Simon refused to become a participant. Instead, he shuffled along until he reached Broadway, where he turned northward, his mind at grips with the plan that would deliver him from the ant-hill of clerks.

He had taken the money, that much was certain. The auditors had given him a clean bill of health that very morning and six weeks would pass before they returned, —— them! Luck had been with him, for after they had gone their coldly precise way to plague another unfortunate teller, Hurley had made his weekly cash deposit.

Thirteen thousand this time. The bank, presided over by a rosy-cheeked old gentleman who gave, upon slight provocation, sage counsel regarding morals and business ethics, was not above numbering a notorious bootlegger among its clients. Simon, a waspish man and meager, had always resented the flamboyant way in which Hurley threw down his money. In his very face, taunting him.

"Another handful of lettuce," Hurley would boom. "Chalk it up to your old pal Al, and here's five bucks to buy yourself a square meal."

Simon had always refused the largess. He hated Hurley with poorly concealed venom, and he chuckled now as he slithered along in the lee of the gaunt-eyed buildings in the wholesale district. For the laugh was on Hurley this time. The ill-gotten thirteen thousand reposed in Simon's breast pocket and was to be the means of his emancipation. All trails were deadened for at least two weeks—he had seen to that. The entry in Hurley's pass-book had been made with ink that would fade by tomorrow morning

and the deposit slip had been destroyed, thereby leaving the bank's records innocent of the transaction. Furthermore, Simon's vacation started the following day and he had flaunted a ticket to Bermuda before the eyes of envious coworkers.

He could visualize Hurley's profane blustering as he tried to convince old Winterbottom that he was short thirteen thousand. What a chance! Simon snickered discreetly. Of course, when two weeks had elapsed and he didn't return, the bank would grow suspicious and investigate. But where? Yes, that was it, just where? Bermuda probably, but that would be but barren soil and a pleasant trip for some overweight detective. Reaching Union Square, he drew out the ticket, touched a match to it and watched the one possible clue curl to a crisp blue ash.

He walked onward, pondering. Would they look for him in South America, the embezzlers' haven? He sincerely hoped so. Mexico, perhaps? He recommended it strongly.

At Forty-second Street he turned into one of the gaudy picture palaces to take one more look at his objective. The long walk uptown had made his feet burn, and he sank gratefully into an imitation leather seat, awaiting the advent of the travel reel he had seen earlier in the week. He watched with a jaundiced eye the unfolding of the moving-picture version of a best seller, mangled and distorted as usual, and crowned with the inevitable "snappy" ending. Then a blaze of light, the tortured tuning-up of forty musicians, the pompous entrance of an inconsequential leader, and the orchestra hurdled its way through the overture from "William Tell."

Darkness again, and Simon leaned forward in rapture. A chain of pine-clad hills sloped upward from a leaf blurred valley.

"The Laurentian Mountains," advised a caption, "although practically unknown, are within a day's journey from New York City." Another view flashed on; a hill-girdled lake feathered by the wind, with a disappearing sun throwing into relief a frieze of sentinel firs. "In northeastern Quebec," came the information, "there are a thousand such lakes, accessible yet aloof, each one a veritable sanctuary."

Simon feasted his eyes and mind for five minutes longer and then departed, fighting his way through the standees and the waiting optimists huddled in the lobby.

"A veritable sanctuary," that was what he wanted, he told himself. Strangely enough, he desired not wine, women or a hectic life. All he asked was to get away from the efficient system of the bank and the press of the sidewalk. Away from the stuffy confines of his room on Third Avenue and the wolflike meals, snapped and worried down.

II

AS THE train drew out of Grand Central his pinched face creased with a frosty grin. He, Simon Mangel, who had never ventured beyond the rim of Greater New York, was going north to his sanctuary. He'd have a cabin built when he found the right spot, and be —— to the bank and Al Hurley! It wouldn't take much to live, and they'd never find him. He rubbed his hands, parchment-dry as a Mexican's, and smiled crookedly into the future.

At two o'clock the next afternoon he detrained in the city of Quebec and, going at once to a sporting goods establishment, he bought, with the expert aid of the shopkeeper, complete equipment for his entry into solitude. He expended his own money, having withdrawn his savings of six hundred dollars, and he left the store with two-thirds of it still intact.

Curiously enough, he felt no sense of guilt. No fear, either. Simon reflected that this self-reliance must have been caused by the change in his surroundings, and his pigeon breast swelled as he strolled toward Dufferin Terrace, which overlooked the green St. Lawrence. Here was something to make a man look twice.

No soap factories, no stinking glue-works; only a majestic river flowing toward the ocean between its natural banks. Simon, whose previous travels had been confined to Coney Island, stared in wonder. What was down there in the lavender distance? Suddenly he remembered. Sanctuary, of course.

Later that evening he watched the dying glory of the sun gilding the windows of Levis, on the opposite shore. It was mid-May, but with the twilight a penetrating breeze stole up the river, caressing his face with sinister fingers, it seemed. He shivered and turned back to the lights of the cosy hotel. A queer place, Simon thought—not much like a New York lobby. Every one here was courteous and quiet-spoken except for one little knot of cartoon-like tourists. No one paid any attention to him; in New York fifty pairs of insolent eyes would have raked his countenance by this time. No noise; only a sort of baronial hall atmosphere.

That was it; no noise, he thought, as he lay awake that night. No screeching elevated tearing past a fellow's window. What was outside, anyhow? He tiptoed to the window and peered out. A light or two far down on some wharf winked up through the velvety darkness, and near at hand Samuel Champlain, in bronze watchfulness, stared into the adventurous gloom. Simon, on the rim of the unknown, slipped back to bed and into the valley of silence for which he had longed.

III

NEXT morning he went down the river to sleepy Tadousac, lying ancient and mellow in the strong sunlight, the point at which he forsook the St. Lawrence for the Saguenay. Northward on the Saguenay! The thought thrilled Simon like the title of an historical novel. Northward to the great unguessed, northward from clocks and linen collars. His rough shirt scratched a trifle, making him feel strangely virile, and he began to swagger.

He consulted an inn-keeper concerning guides and was quickly accommodated with two mahogany-colored French Canadians who understood English.

"Only, m'sieu," cautioned the Boniface, "do not make the mistake of treating them as servants. I tell you this because I see that you are unused to this country. They are good men, Rocheleau and Laviolette, and will guide you with assurance."

Simon hastily agreed, and then turned to the men to make terms and explain the reason for his journey. They listened attentively, at times a little perplexed with his accent, and then Laviolette nodded gravely.

"I understand, m'sieu," he said. "Four dollars she is good pay and I know the place where you will find plenty quiet. We will take you to the north shore of Lac Ste. Marguerite. It is as though held in the palm of God."

Simon started. What did the fellow mean by using such outlandish terms?

"Well, let's get the canoe loaded," he said, trying to appear jovial. "You say you have a good one, so get it ready while I see about provisions."

He hurried away, eager to leave even this last outpost. As he printed a path through the white dust of the village street, he came face to face with the curé, keen-eyed and kindly.

"*Bien venue, mon frère,*" said the priest, raising two fingers.

Simon, sensing that he was being welcomed, negotiated a clumsy bow.

"I am not of your faith," he blurted, and would have hurried on.

"No matter," returned the curé, "you are come to make a voyage on the Saguenay, are you not? Then you will come close to the Father of us all. In His name I welcome you."

"Listen here," said Simon irritably, "I'm not on a pilgrimage, and furthermore, I don't believe in the things that you do. I don't believe in anything, in fact. I'm here to—to forget and to rest. I don't need religion."

"In the wilderness," reminded the

priest, "religion was given birth. Remember, also, that memory is fed by solitude."

Simon looked after him, half fearfully. These people talked like characters in a book. Couldn't they go about their business like normal beings?

Inside an hour all arrangements were completed and Simon, sitting comfortably in the center of the birch canoe, was borne smoothly forward into the stream on the last lap of his flight. The powerful, shortened stroke of these natives, far different from the luxurious sweep beloved of the city dweller, carried their craft along at a royal rate.

Simon, watching the rythmic swing of Rocheleau's shoulders in the bow, the quick deep thrust of the dripping blade, felt his senses lulled into a delicious contentment. Somewhere pallid clerks were poring over ledgers; somewhere thousands were scrambling for a seat in the subway, while he, Simon Mangel, rode like a king. A king with his retainers. He yawned and leaned back.

On they went, keeping close to the bank to avoid the pull of the current, and Simon watched the grassy slopes rolling back from the river like great green billows suddenly stilled. On past whitewashed farmhouses where children waved a greeting; on past the tilled ground which lay seamed like the ruchings on an expanse of brown velvet. The sun had disappeared and the world seemed bathed in a queer emerald radiance. The French-Canadians, apparently noting some familiar landmark, began to sing in liquid baritones and then, around a bend, Simon saw the pale lights of a settlement on the left bank.

"The village of Anse St. Étienne, m'sieu," said Rocheleau, breaking off in the midst of a throaty chorus, "where it will be best to spend the night. Also, a good voyager would depart before dawn tomorrow in order to escape the heat of the sun. Do you wish it so, m'sieu?"

"Of course I do," said Simon, as the canoe slid into the deepening shadows beside a little wharf. "We are three companions and I trust you to decide upon what is good for us." He stretched his cramped little body as the habitants tied up the canoe. "Come on, boys," he added, "let's have supper."

He walked hastily toward the brightest light without glancing back at the enveloping gloom.

He drowsed over a meal of smoking-hot ham and eggs, boiled blueberry pulp and coffee that made him shudder. He made earnest efforts to improve his standing with the guides, but fatigue got the better of him and soon the seeker after peace, covered with Hudson's Bay blankets and a lurid quilt, was snoring as loudly as the most honest man in Anse St. Étienne.

IV

EARLY next morning the voyagers shoved off into a chilling mist that vapored over the gunwales to clutch at Simon's shrinking body. He shivered and peered ahead into the grayish pall, but could see nothing. Silence everywhere, a liquid silence that flowed by unbrokenly. Simon twisted himself for a last glimpse of the huddle of little houses, but they had vanished. All that he could see was the herringbone wake of the canoe and even that was smoothed quickly into oblivion.

He snuggled deep into his coat and thought of the only dawns he knew. Years of them, heralded by the rattle and bang of garbage cans, the slowly revealed bricks of the pockmarked tenements like the lineaments of ageless hags and the clamor of a street-car gong, pressed by a jealous motorman as if to awake more fortunate people. Noisy perhaps, but at least a fellow knew that there was something doing. This pepper-colored stillness was getting on his nerves. Half an hour floated by.

"*Regardez, m'sieu,*" said Laviolette, suddenly crossing himself as Rocheleau did likewise.

Simon raised his eyes and immediately forgot Third Avenue and its matutinal attractions.

High above him, caught in a belt of honey-colored light, a whitened figure gleamed against a background of dark green which rose still higher to the crown of a noble promontory. It appeared as if suspended in the air, the lower part being swathed in the swirling fog.

"Cape Trinity and the Virgin, m'sieu," said Laviolette, as Simon turned, questioning, "and its guardian, Cape Eternity."

Another regal crest of evergreens came into view as Simon stared, and the slanting rays of the sun slowly absorbed the mist, baring the heart-quickening drop of hundreds of feet to the river below. Here was no roar of breaking combers, no creamy froth of spent waves, but instead, the ceaseless current, its very stillness indicative of its depth, flowing past the stern, immovable majesty of the towering rocks.

Heading for the opposite shore, the little party beached the canoe and Simon soon was devouring breakfast with a hitherto unknown zest. He gazed uneasily across the river at the dominant capes, where panels of sheer rock, ripened by the sun, glowed with the warmth of golden fruit. The glistening statue looked down upon an awakening world. Simon pointed at it.

"How did that come to be there?" he asked Rocheleau.

"Many years ago a grand seigneur was very ill," answered the guide, "and he prayed to the Virgin in the church at Pointe Bleue for deliverance from his malady. In the passage of time his prayers were granted and in gratitude he placed that figure up there to give hope and courage to all who travel. It was cast in Montreal, also blessed by the cardinal, and my father, who helped to place it in position, says that the Virgin does not wear her customary sad expression. On the contrary, she smiles."

Simon gulped the remainder of his coffee. Religion again. Would they never have done with it?

"I am not a believer in any religion," he said hurriedly. "If I were sick I should call in a doctor."

"The illness of the seigneur," said Rocheleau, "was not of the body, m'sieu, but of the mind."

"M'sieu says that he has no religion?" interposed Laviolette. "We can see that you are not of our belief; even so, are you not Protestant, not Hebrew, not—"

"Stop!" cried the goaded Simon. "I do not wish to speak or hear of saints and churches. I am here to rest, to escape from the city, to hide."

He checked himself, cursing inwardly and hoping they suspected nothing.

"As you will, m'sieu," agreed Rocheleau. "Come, we will now climb Le Tableau so that you can see as the bird over the land that you have chosen."

In an hour's time Simon stood gasping on the high, level ground back of the capes. Behind him was the river, but he did not look in that direction. Rather, to the north and west, his eyes swept an illimitable sea of forest-crowned ridges. Like many another, Simon had traveled afar through the medium of the news reel and the rotogravure section, but this was different.

No snow-capped peaks met his eye, nor the freaks flung forth by the laborings of nature. Balsam, tamarack and spruce ranged away to the horizon in a parade of feathery plumes. The intervening valleys dripped with color—the fresh, bright yellow-green of young maples, vermillion splashes of Indian paintbrush, burnt sienna of aspens—all underlined with a veining of silver birch. Here and there the countryside was dappled with the shadows of galleon clouds, as if to intensify the enormous sweep and swell of the Laurentians.

Laviolette indicated a wavering spear that ventured westward from the Saguenay.

"The Eternity River," he announced, "on which we will travel to Lac Ste. Marguerite. Look there, she shines for you."

Simon squinted into the bluish distance where a polished silver dollar glinted like a heliograph.

"What lies beyond?" he asked the guide.

He had a queer feeling, somehow, that

he was on the brink of existence. One could see the Rockies and know of the smiling coast-line that lay waiting on the other side. One looked across the Atlantic and could visualize foreign shores. Always people and motion, if one went far enough, but here lay only empty, boundless wilderness.

Laviolette, with characteristic fatalism, shrugged and made an elaborate gesture.

"Only those know who have gone to the end of the La Route du Nord," he replied. "It is the North Road, you comprehend, m'sieu, that leads on through the edge of black Labrador to what, I do not know. It has many branches; one lies here in the valley, and I have followed it for two, maybe three hundred miles. It is an ancient trail, m'sieu, made, we think, by the Indians on their search for Manitou, their god. I have passed on it beyond the timber-line, up through the desolate country where there is nothing but great gray rocks and treacherous valleys of snow that never melts. One can see the trail up to that point, worn smooth over the granite by countless feet. Whole tribes have made their pilgrimage, but where, I do not know. It does not pay a man to be too curious. I turned back to my hills, blessed for our people, as the curé truly says."

The native, with the theatrical sense of a true Frenchman, had not taken the edge from his narrative by mentioning that Chicoutimi, a pulp and paper mill town of fifteen thousand souls, lay less than sixty miles ahead. Even had he done so, it is doubtful whether Simon would have believed him. He was in a thoroughly mapped country, albeit a lonely one, but with the sketchy geographical knowledge of the average New Yorker, believed himself to be within shouting distance of Hudson Bay.

The sun was now "straight up," as Rocheleau termed it, and the three descended to a shady resting place at the mouth of the little river. Simon, restless and moody, watched the preparation of the noon meal. Salmon trout, rolled in cornmeal and browned to a turn, hot biscuits, marmalade and strong green tea gave his appetite the required spur. He munched away absently, picturing his customary fly-blown eating place on Pearl Street. This was better, no doubt about it. Perhaps he'd grow used to the space and the lack of voices.

He straightened up with a jerk. Perhaps? He'd *have* to grow used to it! If he went back there would be a warrant waiting. And back of it loomed a prison. The judge would give him the limit and old Winterbottom would deliver himself of a highly moral lecture. Worst of all, Hurley, with his bloodshot eyes and sodden face, would sneer at him.

He clenched his skinny fingers in desperation. To —— with all of them! He'd stay here. He'd fool them. He began to talk with the guides and the next hour or two was spent in learning the mysteries of jack-knife pitching, shooting at floating bits of wood and listening to Laviolette's lurid recital of sanguinary Saturday night battles in the lumber camps.

When the sun was well on its downward path they started on the last lap, Simon taking a turn in the bow. A mile or so along the weaving little stream Rocheleau pointed out a tributary that ran to a small lake surrounded by a ring of blackened trees.

"Lac Brûlé," he said, "the ground nearby burned because some —— forgot to put out his fire. In the city men laugh at us because we have not their ways, but at least we are not guilty of such —— fool things as that."

The current was growing swifter and the stream rockier, so Simon relinquished his place to the speaker. He noticed the ground rising steadily higher, and finally the little river became a rock-whipped torrent, causing the guides to decide on a portage. Thus the remaining few hundred feet were traveled on foot and on an ever increasing incline. Suddenly the ground dipped slightly and, through a latticework of slender willows, Simon looked upon his goal.

Fed by springs and stained the deep

ultramarine of ice-cold northern lakes, Lac Ste. Marguerite was cupped in what might have been the crater of a miniature volcano. Girdled in green, the cone was the highest point of land for a mile around, and on its very crest nestled the lake. This, at least, had escaped the camera man.

V

FOR seven days Simon luxuriated in his retreat, unconsciously fighting the life-long habits of the city. He did as he wished, yet his eyes were ever on his watch. He fished with worms instead of a Scarlet Ibis, Silver Doctor and Paramachene Belle, sacrificing the picturesque for safety. That was in his blood. He listened to the rich tones of "Alouette" and "En Roulant, Ma Boule," as harmonized by the guides, and yearned for the cacophony of a tin-panny piano with its accompanying mammy singer. He lay in the shade, watching the gauzy, sun-sifted light as it shimmered through satiny leaves, and thought of the clerks spending their lunch-hour at the Battery. A wide-flung carpet of crimson and white trilliums made him think of Central Park, that abortion among public gardens, with its scrubby turf through which peer rocks as the elbows through a beggar's coat.

Poor, city-bound Simon, naked in the wilderness! Blind alike to the cathedral dimness of perfumed aisles and the modesty of yellow violets sheltering south of a clump of moss. Blind to the filigree of moonlight and the brown wild-rice gently shaking in a shallow bay.

The seventh night found him wrestling with indecision. He awoke about midnight, conscious of a velvet stillness, punctuated at intervals by the exhaustive snores of Rocheleau. The tree frogs had ceased their interminable chirping and a pall of silence had descended. He ventured outside his tent, cowering involuntarily as he watched the sky. Great wind-swept clouds were rolling up, crouching clouds that assumed the shapes of monstrous animals preparing to spring. A distant rumble of thunder turned him back to the tent, to emerge fully clothed. The wind increased and the surge and sway of underbrush in the valley was carried along like a ghostly chorus. A deafening crash that shuddered through the hills hypnotized Simon in his tracks. Judgment was marching toward him!

To Simon's craven soul it seemed that the forces of nature were combining to destroy him. A man couldn't hide things out here. No walls, no privacy. The sky was riven by a jagged, blinding streak and large, warm drops spattered upon him. Panic seized him, yet he stood irresolute. But not for long. With a rending crack a pine surrendered to the next bolt of lightning, the wind rose to a crescendo and Simon fled before the silver lances of the rain.

Down the hill he tore in a blind rush, the twigs of hawthorn and raspberry whipping his pale face to a startled red, until his feeble legs collapsed. He lay in the shelter of a fallen tree, gulping the air in great sobs. Another flash showed him that he was close to Lac Brûlé and its cluster of sooty tombstones, silhouetted like gaunt friars against the fitful light. Out on the lake a loon quavered its maniacal laugh and the pale gray veil of dawn touched the brooding hills.

Simon watched the procession of friars with growing terror. He would have sworn that they were moving toward him, bent almost double by the wind, emaciated arms waving, beckoning, threatening. That was the way Retribution came, with its face hidden in the cowl of forgetfulness. Sneaking up, until suddenly it was upon you. He'd seen that happen in the movies. On they seemed to come, remorseless as fate, and Simon Mangel, embezzler, tightened his throat with a rasping screech, and fainted.

ROCHELEAU and Laviolette found him a while later, hunched on the ground like a shrunken mole. They revived him with a searing dose of "whisky blanc" and listened gravely to his fear-accentuated babble.

Camp was struck, the canoe headed for

Tadousac. The next evening Simon bade farewell to two natives, who were greatly relieved at parting with an infidel so manifestly touched by the Evil One.

VI

BY THE time the boat docked at Quebec Simon had made up his mind. The thirteen thousand, still intact, could be placed to Hurley's credit and the proper entries cooked up. He'd return to work day after tomorrow, back to the churn and roar of Nassau Street, and the sooner the better.

His courage, such as it was, came seeping back, and on the train he boasted with the loudest in the smoking compartment, scrunched close against his neighbor for the feeling of companionship. Later, he paced the Pullman aisles, leering with approval at the women and sniffing the vitiated air with all the spirit of a merry-go-round charger.

Before going to sleep he lifted the green blind and stared at the flying darkness. Lac Brûlé and its stark guardians never could reach him now. And that silent figure, high on the cliff, watching, waiting— Well, if he'd stayed up there he might have taken some stock in that sort of thing. A book or a movie would have ended with his conversion, thought Simon. Religion and that bunk was all right when you're afraid, but this time tomorrow he'd be in New York, with lights and crowds. Why be afraid there?

Simon was running true to form. When he had screamed in terror a dozen generations of Mangels had chorused with him. No trail-breakers embellished Simon's family tree. No pioneers or builders or adventurers, but rather an ancestral procession of pants-pressers, buttonhole-makers and money-lenders reached out from a murky past. Camp-followers of civilization, they were pulling him back where he belonged.

He was the first passenger off the express on its arrival at Grand Central, checked his bag and then wallowed blissfully in the midst of sprinting commuters. He admired the displays in the windows of midget shops and remembered having read that a man could live his life in this vast terminal of tile and stone. All his needs could be satisfied without setting foot upon the street. Simon mentally adjured the cock-eyed world that this was some town.

Look at the news-stands with next month's magazines buttressed by slabs of chocolate in silver paper! Look at the latest Prince of Wales model from the shoddy mills of Chicago! Look at the life-size photo advertising the "Indecencies of 1927."

Simon, glutted with staring, silenced the hints of the inner man with a tasty dish of potato salad, and then rode the current flowing toward Broadway. Reaching there, he loafed on a corner, reveling in the meaningless blur of faces with its occasional high lights of unspoiled youth. A gush of foul air billowed from a subway entrance and he sniffed in happy recognition. Little old New York. No place like it, he'd say so!

Across the street the lights of a picture palace winked seductively, and in a moment or two he had surrendered his ticket to the rear-admiral at the door. A flitting circle of light guided him to a seat and he prepared to enjoy the alleged comedy that was commencing. In the rear hovered the incense of onions; in front a couple were eating from a crackly paper bag, while beside him sat a fat blonde, redolent of cheap scent. But Simon was oblivious to all these distractions. He was thinking.

Tomorrow would find him back on a stool with a certainty of bi-monthly pay checks stretching away toward the horizon. No one would ever know what he had tried to do. He had no regrets about giving up the money because it wasn't worth the price of fear. He glanced around at the blanket of upturned faces ghastly blue in the dim light, then nestled closer against the yielding plush of his chair and sighed contentedly. What a fool he had been to run away. This was it, right here. Sanctuary.

The Greatness

By
LYMAN BRYSON

LITTLE Mungye's natural position in this world was at the after end of an elephant's spine. He could be quite useful there. He was a good rope-holder. The method of hunting elephants in the Ban Dong country is for a brave man to sit astride the neck of a tame tusker with a noose at the end of a pole, and to attach that noose to the hind foot of any elephant that can be run down in his native wildness.

The rope-holder, riding on the hunter's beast in the position of lesser dignity, slides off at the proper moment and makes the end of the rope fast to a handy tree. Mungye had been known to slide off and forget to tie his rope, but his timorousness was ordinarily useful because when once a wild elephant is tied everybody concerned is much safer and Mungye wanted safety above everything.

Mungye had tied ropes for the most famous hunters of Ban Dong, such as Tu-op and Tu-op's son Blay, and even Kroon the surly. But he was not content. He was a grown man now and he wanted to be a hunter himself, a veritable *pakam*, and claim the honor of snaring his own elephants. He maintained importance as well as he could by being the most shameless boaster of the tribe, by wearing a larger knife at his shoulder than any other man wanted to be burdened with, and by covering his arms with copper bracelets to the elbow. He was a very fierce looking fellow to children or to strangers who did not know him, for his brown face was twisted up in a perpetual scowl. He let the ends of his almost invisible mustache grow long and twisted his hair in a high knot to make himself taller. Very often he refused to answer greetings; he considered it more dignified to march on with his flat nose in the air.

Sacrifices to the gods of the forest and the Yumbra mountains, although publicly made, did not save him from bad luck. A special amulet of a tiger's tooth was useless. At the last great hunt he had earned a terrible reprimand from the old chief. He was permitted to pass the jar of rice wine to the elephants, as was the custom. But when he approached one wily grayback, a beast called Uncle which belonged to a *pakam* called Ngooworta, he was careless. He let the elephant snatch the jar from his hand and pour the jarful down his throat. Thus fortified for the hunt, old Uncle trumpeted in mischievous joy, butted playfully at his companions, smearing everything around with blood from the chopped buffalo flesh that adorned his head as a good sign, leaned against a tree and went solemnly to sleep. The augury of the

of Little Mungye

or the Elephant Called Uncle

rice grains had been good, the reports of game from the jungle were exciting, but this drunken elephant delayed the start of the hunt and Mungye had to take the blame. It was a completely unsuccessful expedition and nobody had the least doubt that the fault was Mungye's.

Mungye's refuge was in song. The chants of his tribe are melancholy like all the chants of simple men, melancholy about love, or losses in war, or the death of friends. Regardless of subject, Mungye appreciated their dolefulness. His interpretations made them all shrieks of despair. He sat at the doorway of his empty house, for Mungye was still a bachelor, and cried to the jungle evening. His pigs, rooting under his floor, might be appreciating the music; otherwise, he was conscious of only his sorrow and the moon.

Mungye lived in the only house in the village that had no women folk. When he sang in the ancient cadences that his hearth was cold and his heart uncared for it was the truth. The house with its mats and kettles and its pigs he had inherited, as is the custom, from his mother. She and all his other forbears were dead. The fact that he had no wife of his own was an almost unbelievable eccentricity. The true reason for his loneliness, the fact that he had never been courageous enough to ask for a woman, would not have been believed by other Ban Dong men even of Mungye.

His list of songs was short and he had to repeat frequently. The one which seemed best to release his vague emotions was a love plaint.

> "O lovely girl, soft-voiced and tender.
> O gentle gracious one, are you listening when I cry my sorrow?
> Are you waiting to cook my rice and draw the water from the river for my house?"

He sang it with open throat and a raucous energy, his eyes closed, his head thrown back, his knees drawn up to his bursting chest as he squatted on the platform by his door.

It was probably because his eyes were closed that he did not notice his listener the night she came. It was dim, misty evening, for the air was almost cool in the changing season and the river exhaled a white breath. He did not see a figure which came slowly toward his house and rested at the foot of his bamboo ladder. When he paused there was an answer.

"Are you faithful, O brave one?
Will you keep your vows?"

Mungye stiffened in alarm. Very cautiously he leaned and looked over the edge of his little platform.

"Who are you?" he asked in a voice that showed no lover-like gentleness.

"I am the daughter of Ngooworta, O sad young man."

"Humph!" said Mungye.

The figure waited, evidently expecting the duet to go on. Mungye sat still looking as truculent as possible.

Undismayed, the figure at the foot of the ladder began on her own account:

"Are you faithiul, O sad young man?
Are you as strong as the spear you throw?
As trustworthy as the knife you wield?"

Mungye rose and went into his house. This was not the impersonal and satisfactory singing he enjoyed. He watched around his door post. When the daughter of Ngooworta drifted on in the mist he shivered with relief.

Next night, however, after his lonely rice had been eaten he ventured to sing again, sticking close to the subject of defeat in war this time and alert for the approach of a responsive visitor.

She came and interrupted him resolutely.

"Why do you sing of war when your heart is broken with the pain of love, Mungye?"

He scorned to answer.

"Here is my bracelet, O mighty hunter," she said. "Give me yours and we shall be bound together in everlasting happiness."

"Will you go away, woman?"

"Oh, cruel one!"

She began to sing again in a shrill voice that carried across the village:

"O cruel one, we have exchanged our vows of love.
Will you leave me now to be a disgrace in the eyes of my father and my brothers?
Must blood and sorrow follow our happy courtship?"

The mighty knife of Ngooworta waved before poor Mungye's terrified vision.

"Hush, hush," he pleaded.

She waited a moment, but began again to sing.

"Here is my bracelet," said Mungye in despair.

That was his betrothal and his wedding was one of the most magnificent ever celebrated in Ban Dong. Ngooworta was rich. The water of the sacrifice was sprinkled on the feet of Mungye at great cost and at great length. He was dazed for a while. It took several weeks of time before and after his marriage for him to realize that it must have been his prowess, his inherent mightiness, which had driven Ngooworta's daughter to declare herself.

Once bound, he accepted his fate. His bride was very modest in the presence of every one but himself and he was sorry for her, realizing the excessive passion his greatness had inspired.

A FEW months after his gorgeous wedding, when Mungye had recovered his self-importance again, a new hunt was urged by the chief of Ban Dong. The chief never went into the forest himself. His crippled senility saved him from that, but he had the right as head man of the tribe to name the days. He explained in council that he had been consulting his talisman, the sacred toe-nail of the elephant of Nget-Ngwal, god of all elephants. This talisman, which he wore around his neck in a silk rag, had been thumping him in the night, he said. Evidently Nget-Ngwal intended to signify that hunting would be good.

Some of the hunters, Tu-op the impious especially, thought perhaps there might be other reasons for the hunt besides nocturnal activities on the part of the sacred toe-nail. The men of Ban Dong had been getting quarrelsome recently; several dangerous feuds had come to a head in violence. Tu-op suspected that the old chief was practising one of the oldest arts known to rulers—creating an outside expedition to avoid difficulties at home. But Tu-op, of course, said nothing against the hunt on that account.

Mungye conveyed the interesting news to his bride over the evening's rice. She was squatted by the fire that burned in the box of earth in the corner of the house and she looked up at him through thick smoke inquiringly. She was a handsome little creature; Mungye felt indulgently proud of her already. He had not yet been disturbed by a certain grimness that showed in the corners of her betel-reddened mouth when she spoke intimately of family matters.

He might go this time, he said, as rope-holder for Kroon.

"You will not," said his wife.

Mungye, for the sake of everybody's dignity, overlooked this flat contradiction. How else could he go, having no elephant of his own?

"My father has an elephant," said his wife.

Mungye considered. Ngooworta had an elephant to be sure, the old beast familiarly known as Marr, which means Uncle. He wondered if Uncle could still be depended upon to run down a wild one in the forest. He remembered with some distaste the exploit of Uncle with the rice wine.

He found that his considering had nothing to do with the case. His wife told her father that Mungye was going hunting on Uncle; and her father, who evidently knew her better than her husband did as yet, sent Uncle over to Mungye's house. An impertinent grandson came along to act as rope-holder and make unnecessary remarks.

By the time the hunt was ready, Mungye had renamed Uncle, calling him "Teegemott" which means "Very large." He called him Very Large in a very large voice when he rode him but whispered, "Please, Uncle," into his flapping ear to make sure.

Uncle was lumbering and old certainly, but he knew the jungle and he could smell a wild one. Mungye had an uncomfortable feeling that the old fellow was being surprizingly rejuvenated by the preparations for the expedition. The smell of roasting buffalo flesh, the smell of raw meat plastered on his nose, his own draft of rice wine—very cautiously administered—the clanging of gongs and the thumping of drums, the yells and shouts and horn blowing of a savage jubilation seemed to put new life and mischief into Uncle's gray soul.

When the procession started off, with Mungye scowling at the jungle ahead as if the wild herd might be waiting there in the edge of it, Uncle tried to trot out of his place in the line and butted the elephant just ahead until the rope-holder, whose life was endangered, turned on his perch and advised Mungye to get down and let some one ride Uncle who knew how to manage him.

"*Hien, hien,* Teegemott," pleaded Mungye. "Gently, big fellow."

But Uncle was apparently determined that his rider should distinguish himself. He needed no goading in the first three days of the journey when they pushed on through damp woods and clinging brush, wading in swampy grass, tearing and hacking a path through the writhing lianas. On the fifth day the *pakams* heard a crashing ahead of them. There could be no doubt about it. A wild herd was feeding in the bamboos.

The Ban Dong hunters went forward with a great noise. No use to try a quiet approach. The wild herd and the pursuers plunged ahead, twin thunders in the green dusk.

Mungye's rope-holder held on, screaming like a monkey, and Mungye lay close to Uncle's bumpy skull to keep from being brushed off. A foolish wild one turned aside and Uncle was after him without losing a stride. Away from the others they went until Mungye began to feel that he was alone in a rocking, terrible world, alone with a screaming monkey and two elephants, none of which showed any sign of submitting to his wishes.

Everybody knows that a chased elephant is not supposed to turn. It is contrary to the rules of the game. When Mungye saw that his own quarry had paused in an open space and whirled about he waved his noose frantically and

tried to shout. The answer to his shout was a trumpet of defiance from the elephant he had intended to capture. Uncle did not pause.

Mungye saw that the way ahead was going to be firmly disputed by several tons of desperate elephant. His rope-holder had slid off with a final scream. Mungye committed the most serious sin that an elephant rider can commit, because it seemed at the time the most sensible thing to do. He got down and left the affair to Uncle.

From the lower branch of a tree he saw the old fellow meet the charge of the wild one head on, stop him with a sickening crash of skull against skull. The wild one drew back, staggered a step or two to one side, and then trotted weakly off into the brush. Uncle looked around inquiringly as if to ask where, in the name of all the tribe of Ban Dong, was the man with the noose?

It would have been a very pleasant escape if Mungye had succeeded in getting down from his tree before three other *pakams* came on the scene. He worked fast. He explained as he climbed down that the pursued one had turned and charged and that he had been tossed from his seat by the impact. When the elephants began to fight he was helpless, of course, and had to climb a tree. He told his story with a good deal of conviction but the *pakams* only laughed. The more he elaborated his tale the funnier they thought it was. By the time the hunt had returned to the village they expressed hilarious doubts about the fact that there ever had been a wild elephant who charged.

Mungye folded his face in a new scowl and rode Uncle's bruised head in dignified silence. Let them laugh! For the first time in a long history of humiliations Mungye knew where solace could be found. Here among these rough hunters who escaped troubles themselves only because of their luck he could not answer back. He had to swallow insinuating taunts. When Blay, son of Tu-op, offered to lead Uncle home for him Mungye gritted his filed, betel-stained teeth and thanked him politely. But when he got home again he could march into his own house, straight into the worshiping arms of one who believed in him, admired him, was, in fact, afraid of him.

They came into the village to a wild welcome that made no discrimination in degrees of heroism. Mungye had been more than restored to normal courage when he finally left the feast and started home with his wife modestly trailing him. He climbed his ladder, seated himself on the best mat and called for betel.

"Now," he said, when he had worked up a cud into pleasant spicy succulence, "now I will tell you about the hunt."

His woman was masticating vigorously on her own account. There was something slightly vicious about the way her slender handsome jaws bit together. She said nothing.

Mungye threw out his chest.

"No other man in Ban Dong," said Mungye, "has ever been charged by a *pay-rouay-bree*, a wild elephant, and has lived to tell his wife about it."

His wife checked her rapid jaws for an instant as she looked at him and then began chewing again.

"I did it," said her mighty husband. "I was charged by the greatest elephant in the world. But because I am a *pakam* and a man I kept your father's old elephant firm in his place and—"

His wife interrupted her chewing to laugh. She opened her mouth wide and let her shrill thin laughter forth in keen happiness.

Mungye put an extra wrinkle in his scowl and asked her what ailed her. She kept on laughing.

"Is there something funny about Mungye's being charged by a wild elephant?" Mungye demanded.

When she managed to quiet her mirth she nodded.

"Yes," she said. "Everything about Mungye is funny."

"What do you mean, woman? Even the risk of my life?"

She waved her comely round arms and

leaned back her head to laugh again.

"Perhaps you don't believe me." A shivering doubt stole over poor Mungye.

"Of course not," answered his worshipful mate. "Who would?"

Mungye knew then that his bad luck had not changed. In the presence of others his wife was the same modest, adoring, and well-mannered person. She gave him the laborious and servile attention which is a man's right—as long as they were in public. She risked no scandal against herself. In the precincts of home she showed a cunning skill in hen-pecking, worthy of a more difficult task.

Mungye took it. What else could he do? His fears crystalized into the thought of what would happen if it was ever discovered by other Ban Dong husbands that one wife in the village had her own way about everything, changed her opinion whenever one tried to agree with her pretended silly disabilities and forced her man to cook the rice.

His home was poisoned. It was not the place he had hoped for, where he could boast in greatest ease. He had to do all his boasting in the social gathering of *pakams* in the center of the village. He boasted there, of course, even of his wife, until the day when in the midst of a very happy masculine celebration his wife appeared and commanded him shortly to come home. Nothing like that had ever happened in Ban Dong before.

Mungye obeyed and the shouts of laughter that followed him made the back of his short neck crawl with shame.

It was then that he sought Tu-op, a wise man and Mungye's mother's brother. He spoke of many other things first as was decent and then—

"A wife who does not know her place is a terrible thing, is it not, O Elder Brother?"

Tu-op took his long pipe from his mouth and asked innocently—

"Are there such women, Mungye?"

They sat by Tu-op's door and Mungye looked to see if Tu-op's own women were busy with the evening rice before he answered. He rubbed one bare foot over the other pensively.

"I have heard so," he said. "What could a man do, O Elder Brother?"

Tu-op smiled.

"Kill her and get another," he advised.

Mungye was too distressed to observe the old man's expression of mocking solemnity.

"Are there no charms?"

"If you want magic," said Tu-op, "go to Irap the soothsayer. The only medicine I have ever known against a woman's folly was her husband's wrath."

Mungye sighed. He changed the subject and left as soon as he politely could. He went toward his house slowly through the dusk, but when he approached he paused at the very foot of the ladder. The sound of singing inside struck his heart with melancholy regrets. He turned toward the river bank. There on the muddy shore was Uncle, the elephant.

"Lie down, big fellow," he commanded. "I have no heart for rice and I am going to sleep with you."

The old brute rested in the cool damp earth and let Mungye snuggle against him. They watched the moon come up and the smoky lights of Ban Dong flicker on to the hour "when the children go to bed." The wind and the friendly darkness soothed them together. A perfumed coolness went over black river. Green doves murmured among the vines.

In that perfumed air, Mungye caught a strange odor. It was pleasant at first, but there was something rank about it. It was animal and wild. He sniffed it voluptuously and wondered drowsily what it could be. His arm, seeking a more comfortable position, stretched up toward Uncle's head and caught on a sharp point. He felt of it with his fingers. There was a twig, protruding from the elephant's head just in front of his ear. Mungye pulled at it and his pillow moved under him convulsively.

Mungye's heart skipped a beat. He understood the strange odor then. It came from that little gland in the old elephant's head and the wily one had tried

to dig out the exudation with a stick. There was nothing scientific about Mungye's elephant lore, perhaps, but it was none the less hypothetical for that.

Ban Dong elephants, being models for all the elephants in the world, did what elephants are supposed to do. They lost their virtue, their respect for their masters, their fear of punishment, on uncalculated occasions. They went *must.* Nget-Ngwal himself, the red-eyed god of all elephants, could not have predicted what the rogue would do when mad with that periodic madness. Nor was Nget-Ngwal's inspiration necessary to help the rogue devise wickedness. Often the exudation of a strange smelling stuff from the gland in the head was the sign of the approaching crisis.

Poor Uncle might not be going *must.* Sometimes the glands were active without driving a tusker insane. But in Mungye's world there were only unhappy endings. He was curled up handily against the very tusks of an elephant that might go rogue at any moment and destroy him.

Mungye leaped. As he went he put his elbows sharply into the companion he had been affectionately appreciating and Uncle grunted in surprize. The old beast's tiny eyes blinked futilely in the dusk and his trunk reached out after the fleeing Mungye. It was undignified to be thus deserted, roughly and without reason. Weird disturbances that had been working in the brain of Uncle swelled until something clicked and he understood what it was he wanted. He wanted to tear up the village of Ban Dong and throw it into the river. He rose clumsily and started for the nearest house.

Mungye, in the meantime, had reached home. He slipped twice going up the bamboo pole, bumping his chin, but he scrambled through the door. He flung at his woman the terrible warning.

"The Uncle has gone *must!*"

She chewed calmly and stirred her rice pot.

"Yah!" she said. "You are a fool and a coward."

"He has gone mad, I tell you!"

"Too old," she objected with her obstinate air of knowing everything in the world. "He is too feeble—"

There was a squeal outside and the house, losing two of its supporting poles when Uncle broke through them on his first charge, went over sidewise. The supper fire and Mungye's woman slid together into a corner out of which came smoke and wild screams and a bright flame as the fire caught the walls.

Uncle, having disposed to his satisfaction of that house, went on to the next.

Mungye's woman rolled out of the bonfire through the flimsy wall and lay on the ground, screaming maledictions on her husband. He stood by watching in the light of his own home's destruction the progress of the gentle Uncle.

The next dwelling was a large one, for his neighbor was a man with numerous children, aunts, grandmothers, and dependent servitors. When the crazy elephant ripped out one post the whole multitude came yelling out the door. Uncle trumpeted at them and moved on. He slammed another place over with a butt of his lowered head and became interested in the noisy pig that was caught in the ruins. He picked up the pig with his trunk and the end of a sawed-off tusk and trotted to the river. The pig made a very amusing splash and Uncle came back for more.

But the general alarm was rousing all of Ban Dong. By the time Uncle had torn out several more house pillars, tossed a child up on a roof, drowned another pig, and was busy with a buffalo, a squad was mobilized against him. Blay was mounted on his hunting tusker, Ngooworta and Kroon the surly were on theirs. Five docile but young and powerful elephants converged on the point where Uncle was strewing mischief. He saw them coming and was off into the blackness of jungle.

No use to follow him that night. The villagers lit torches of bamboo splits and wandered about, surveying their own damage and their neighbors, collecting their children and animals and fowls.

The cry of some old woman lamenting the smash of a favorite rice pot mounted at intervals above the general clamor. The children who were old enough to run and make noises out of their elders' chastening reach took their chance to celebrate the freedom of the night. After an hour or two weariness quieted them all. Homeless ones found sleeping space with friends. Murmurs, dull, irritated, fatigued, followed the shouts.

One common sentiment pervaded the murmurs. It was an elephant under the care of Mungye which had upset the universe. The old fellow had never shown any roguish traits when Ngooworta kept him. He had always been called Uncle because of his venerable gentleness. Mungye had ruined him. Beyond any possible doubt it was Mungye's fault.

Mungye retreated from their questions and their sneers to the ruins of his home. The moon was high now. He could see that all he had left was a heap of ashes out of which a surviving bamboo pole stuck straight up. Mungye felt that there should be some sign of desolation flying from this charred, pathetic standard. He considered hanging a cock's liver on it in the morning as a sacrifice to the unreasonably wrathful and persistent gods—if he could borrow the necessary rooster.

He sat down by the ashes on his bare heels and poked with a twig at some blackened things that might have been rice pots once. He shivered occasionally in the despair that was beyond speech, beyond song even. All around him, nearby and in the farthest corners of the village, Ban Dong people were sleeping again, or were mourning ruin like himself. But they were quiet. He was alone. Lonesomeness is a great healer, for it suggests an end to bickering and challenge. It lulls a miserable man into the thought that the world is peaceful. Lonesomeness is a melancholy brother of sleep and comes as he does, a blessing after abrading conflicts with sadly imperfect fellow creatures. Lonesomeness is—

"Fool!" There was a low but venomous call from a shadow that had approached him. His lonesome peace was poisoned with a presence. He did not trouble to answer or to turn his head.

But when the shadow squatted at his side he spoke—toward the ash heap.

"You are not going to your father's house then?"

"Later, perhaps."

"It is time to sleep," he suggested.

"I am thinking of the new house you will build for me here," said the woman.

"I do not deserve a wife," suggested Mungye, hopefully.

"No. You do not."

Mungye stirred the ashes again.

"Ngooworta has room in his house—"

She laughed in a way she had that failed altogether to suggest pleasant mirth.

"I sleep in Ngooworta's house tonight," she said. "And at the hour of the sun in the palm trees I shall return and you will come with me to the place I have chosen for a new house. You do not deserve a wife, for you are a coward and a fool. But I need a husband and I have no other. Good night."

Still he did not turn his head nor cease his idle poking in the ashes. But when the hour of the sun in the palm trees came to Ban Dong again and illuminated the sorry wrecks of Uncle's mischief, Mungye was not there. He was hours away in the jungle, seeking wearily the track of the crazy beast. He did not sleep at all until sorrow and the thousand fears that pressed in on him from the mysterious terrible forest had been overborne by fatigue.

An ant woke him, the first scout of an army which would have consumed him as a fire destroys if he had not stirred. It was bright day. The little clearing of high grass he had dropped into with his last conscious step was alive with enterprising and tenacious insects.

All he had in the way of provisions was a little bag of rice and a little bottle of rice wine for consolation.

If he had any intention in his misery-addled head it was escape. He was breaking the gentle bonds of marriage

in the only way he could devise. Following the trail of the crazy elephant had been instinctive; it was a path of flight. Uncle, by this time, was probably far toward the grass plains or off in the bamboo thickets that lay toward the foot of the Yumbra mountains.

Mungye yawned and stood on one foot like a sleepy crane. Around him the high grass swayed slowly, soggy with the dew. The brush made a complete circle without the sign of an opening into its tangles. With the timorous eye of a village dweller Mungye followed the circular wall clear around. He glanced at the sun, calculated the direction whence he had come, and struck across his clearing toward the place where he thought he might find the river.

Mungye wished he could eat flowers. The woods were festooned with wildly brilliant orchids, with camellias and great trumpets of flame. There were tree ferns of fantastic beauty, but Mungy's perception, controlled more than usual perhaps by his appetite, passed over the display unmoved. He found some eggplant and a stalk or two of maize, relics probably of an obliterated village. Just before he came to the river he stumbled on a rattan rope. The grass did not show that it had been recently trampled but he knew some hunter must have passed that way. He coiled the rope over his shoulder and pushed on. Except for this he felt that he was now the only man in the world.

But not the only living creature. Tendrils reached after him; insects bored at his hardened skin; leeches sucked. A monkey, overcome with curiosity, followed him for an hour. Sometimes there blew to his flat nostrils faint signals of the presence of less harmless beasts. But he pushed on.

At the river he drank like an ox. He was refreshed but the restoration of his strength led him to try to think. In half an hour he was asleep in a little patch of cool ferns.

When the sun went down he had a spell of wakefulness and rubbed two sticks into a smolder to make a little fire. That might keep the Great Lord from coming up and swallowing him. He started once to sing but his voice croaked in terrifying echoes through the forest and he shivered back into silence. Sleep, his permanent alternative to all other ways of passing time, blessed him again.

When he awoke it was still black night, but he was not alone. On the opposite side was a huge, incredible shape. It might be a rock or a magically over-grown tree. He rubbed his eyes. It was an elephant, sitting pensively on his haunches like a dog and gazing at the fire.

There was something wistful about Uncle's attitude. His hind legs were flat on the ground, his fore legs stiffly upright, his great head wagging to one side, and his trunk dragging on the ground. Regrets for an hour of ungentlemanly wickedness made him sad perhaps.

Mungye was too terrified to interpret abject repentance. He groaned and tried to roll away. Uncle's trunk caught him and felt all over him as if seeking for something.

Mungye knew at once what he had come into the jungle for. He had come to die. The crazy old elephant was standing over him. Uncle was waving his long trunk back and forth and blinking in fierce excitement.

Mungye closed his eyes and lay perfectly still. Uncle gave him another push, evidently wanting the fun of playing with him, cat-like, before tearing him to pieces or treading him to death. The hunter shut his eyes still tighter. Uncle pushed him again and waited. Very cautiously Mungye opened one eye in a crack. Uncle was wagging his head slowly. He cropped up a tuft of ferns with his trunk and started them toward his mouth. An idea struck him, however, and he brushed the ferns across the man's screwed-up face. The ferns tickled, and poor Mungye's sham exploded in a helpless sneeze. At this sign of life the elephant grunted with satisfaction and wrapped his trunk around his master. Giving up his life in a groan, Mungye felt himself swung through the air.

He came down sprawling on the rider's seat on Uncle's neck. Uncle wiggled a vast ear and trotted away through the forest. When he got over being surprized, and took heart in the possibility that this was not really a prelude to death, Mungye noted that they were not going toward Ban Dong. They were traveling steadily into the deeper jungle. That was satisfactory to him and he would not have disputed any intention his charger showed. He adjusted the rope on his shoulder and peeled his eye for low swinging branches.

Uncle evidently knew where he was going. He trotted steadily with the rocking step that seems slow but eats up distance. Sometimes his trunk wagged ahead of him, searching the air for news.

Mungye's enlightenment came when the old fellow slowed down in a clump of bamboos and after a moment of reconnoitering broke out of shelter like a thunderbolt. He was charging at something gray and massive standing in deep grass a hundred yards ahead.

Mungye would have rolled off if he had the nerve, but this time he was too frightened to do anything but hold fast.

The gray mass ahead cocked forward its ears, lifted a thick trunk and an absurd small tail, and faced squarely toward them. It may have been the one whose charge Uncle had met once before. Mungye wondered afterward if this was not perhaps a last act in a matter of elephant's honor. Uncle and this strange beast appeared to have something between them to settle.

Mungye considered moving back along Uncle's spine to his rope-holder's seat in the rear but that would have been a difficult journey. He shut his eyes again.

For a few seconds he rode the earthquake. Then he was bounced into the grass and lay there while the earthquake played around him. When he dared at last to look he saw that it was not an elephant fight that was going on. It was a lesson in manners administered by an old and civilized tusker to a barbarian. Uncle evaded the bewildered wrath of the wild one, countered the thrusts of his great white swords and kept bumping him methodically. His huge square forehead hammered at the wild one's sides and shoulders and ribs, delivering blows like an impossibly agile battering ram. The wild one squealed and trumpeted and finally tried to run away. Uncle ran alongside and turned him against a heavy tree.

With a dazed droop to his bruised head, the wild one stood.

Little Mungye was scared. Never in his life of blustering fears had he been worse frightened. But there was an elephant standing still, guarded by Uncle, and on Mungye's shoulder was a rope. The spark of tribal courage that was in the shaking Mungye took possession of him. He crept through the grass and made the free end of his rattan fast to a sturdy teak.

The wild one was lifting his hind legs in nervous rhythm. He heard something moving behind him, but there was the terrible battering ram before him and he dared not turn. He felt a strange grip tighten on his leg.

His wrath was something terrible to see. But the rope was a strong one; with the aid of Mungye's new luck it held fast. The wild one would have broken it perhaps if Uncle had not been there to crowd him unmercifully when he tried to charge.

Then Mungye, not scowling like a terrible *pakam* but laughing like a boy because for the first time in his life he had really done something, got up again on Uncle's back and drove the weary disheartened captive around and around the teak tree, winding him closer and closer to its side.

He gave quite specific instructions to the beast, who gave evidence of knowing a good deal more than he did and turned toward home. He took only three steps. There was an angry squeal behind him. Uncle stood fast by the captive but was reaching toward Mungye with his trunk. Mungye dared not run, although all his confidence in the elephant was puffed out in an instant, and he dared not go closer

again. The protesting trunk waved, beckoning him to come back. Mungye stood miserably for some minutes, frozen like a wild thing. Then he had the rare experience of an idea. Very prudently he advanced toward his dangerous friend and extended just within reach the little bottle of rice wine that had been swinging on his neck. Uncle's corrupt old soul shone in his little eyes and a shiver of joy went through his valiant scarred old body. He poured the draft down his throat, tilting his head as far back as he could, and tossed the bottle away. Mungye picked it up and started off cautiously. When he saw that Uncle had turned his attention to business he ran like a mouse deer for cover and for home.

The topsy-turvy world was right side up again. He was not an exile now. He marched along and sang huskily as he went. When he thought of his wife he improvised terrible threats into the thread of his song.

THE first person to meet the returned hunter in the village was a child who ran to her mother, trying with chattering teeth to scream "Mungye! Mungye!"

With admirable fortitude the Ban Dong people had accepted the fact of Mungye's destruction by the terrible Uncle. His wife was making a strident fuss in her father's house. Everyone else, busy with rebuilding houses or the ordinary affairs of life, thought it was too bad, of course, but what could be expected if a man wandered off after his elephant when the brute was *must?*

They crowded around his restored self and shouted questions at him. Was he hurt and where was Uncle?

"The big fellow?" Mungye responded calmly. "Oh, I have subdued him!"

There was an incredulous gasp. Subdued him? How?

"There are ways," answered Mungye with a mysterious and dangerous smile.

"Where is he then?"

"I left him in the forest guarding a wild one that I captured last night," said Mungye. "Will some of you mount and take your ropes and bring the new one home?"

They whispered among themselves. Caught a wild one, had he?

Would he go to his father-in-law's house and see his wife, they asked, before setting out to bring in his capture? No, he would consider going home later. He hurried their preparations and led them back, still incredulous, to where Uncle stood guard in the jungle.

Cautiously they circled around the two elephants there—the wild one that trumpeted rage and defiance, and the one they feared still more because of his madness. But little Mungye swung to the ground confidently and in sight of all of them walked up to Uncle. In his hand he carried a little jug. At his command Uncle was as docile as he had ever been. Uncle had gone *must*—there could be no question about that—but he was now completely cured, a perfect elephant again. How much of his mischievous rage had been wearied out of him by the destruction of a dozen houses and a night's wild careening through the jungle was not considered. He was a great beast and Mungye was his master, jug or no jug!

When Mungye the mighty was brought back into Ban Dong at the head of the *pakam's* column, they took him before the chief to be praised for his valor and then escorted him to the door of Ngooworta's house where his father-in-law and his wife awaited him.

The woman was abject. At least she bowed down before her lord with genuflections of terror and adoration. It was remarked by Tu-op, whose observations were cynical, that even while she was kneeling before Mungye in all his greatness, and the lanes of the village were echoing with his shouted praise, she whispered something to him that brought a moment's pallor to the great one's brown cheek. But no one else saw any such thing. Ever since then Mungye has been an honored hunter in all public affairs. What goes on in his own house is his own business.

The Head-Hunters

BY

MICHAEL J. PHILLIPS

DESPITE his Celtic surname, Raimundo Reilly came from an old Peruvian family. His closest friends at the American university which he attended were Dick Carlock and Dane Van Brunt. When they received their diplomas at the same commencement, he persuaded them to come to South America for a visit.

They went first to the Reilly townhouse in Lima and enjoyed thoroughly a stay of several weeks, dancing, dining and riding. They were planning to leave for the vast cattle ranches of the Reillys in the State of Cuzco when Carlock came bursting in, alight with excitement.

"Just met Billy Gold, a fellow I used to know in Chicago," he cried. "He's invited me to go with him on an expedition to the headwaters of the Amazon—moving pictures, you know. He'll take you fellows if I say so. Are you game?"

Reilly replied gravely:

"Count me out, Dick. I like to live too well."

"What do you mean?" demanded Carlock.

"Head-hunters; little fellows who live up there in the jungle. You never see them till it's too late. They have long blow-pipes filled with poisoned arrows. A puff, and you drop paralyzed. Then they cut your head off and go to work on it.

"They have plant-juices and leaves and a system of compresses that no one has ever lived to figure out. But when they get done, the head, perfect in every feature but shrunken to about a third its natural size, is set up for the village to admire."

"Why do they do it?" asked Van Brunt.

"Tribal tradition. The fellow with the most heads is a great chief. Then occasionally they'll sell or trade one for supplies."

"I don't believe it!" burst out Carlock.

"I've seen them," retorted Reilly. "There's a waterfront place here which gets hold of one occasionally. I'll show you some time."

"Bunk!" burst out Carlock. "You can't scare me, Ray. I'm going with Gold."

Some time was required to outfit the expedition, and Carlock spent it in cultivating a mustache and pointed beard. The adornment was fiery red in color; he was inordinately proud of it.

"No time for a shave out there," he explained.

After they bade him good-by Reilly and Van Brunt crossed the mountains to the ranches.

Several months passed very pleasantly. It was again July when they returned to Lima. Their first inquiries were for the Gold expedition, but no word had been received from it. Van Brunt decided to return home without his friend. On steamer day as they were strolling near the pier, Raimundo stopped and said:

"Remember what I told you and Dick about the head-hunters? Here's that curiosity shop. Let's see if they have any specimens."

Just inside the low door they stopped. On the fly-blown showcase was a human head, perfect in every particular, evenly shrunken until it was little bigger than an orange. The tiny, glazed eyes looked at them with almost a living expression. The lower part of the face was covered by a red mustache and pointed beard.

It was the head of Dick Carlock.

Kingbird

By HUGH PENDEXTER

DAVID GEEN in the tall grass by the creek watched the dot down the Indian Nation trail develop into a small man on an unusually large roan horse. The rider, on discovering Geen's horse picketed up the creek, reined the roan down to a walk. He did not locate Geen in the thick grass until he had approached within easy pistol-shot. Geen sprang to his feet and quickly gained the trail and stood with his hands on his hips, close to his two guns. He scrutinized the horseman closely. The latter approached at a walk. The thinness of his face was accentuated by the big hat. An attempt at a beard had not advanced beyond a yellow, scrubby fuzz which was insufficient to conceal the receding chin. Geen, as he stared at him, was trying to remember something.

The stranger halted and cheerily called out—

"Be I aiming right to hit Medicine Lodge?"

"Off your course some miles," mechanically replied Geen, as his memory almost recalled an elusive something. "Medicine Lodge is northeast of here. This crick runs into the Salt— Wait a second— Good land and hallelujah! That's who you are! Charlie Pottle from Ryansville back in Iowy! Little Charlie Pottle, or I'm seven liars! Off that hoss, you runt, and shake hands!"

The small, inquisitive eyes darted up and down the tall figure. The lips parted in the beginning of a pleased smile, then straightened as the heavily bearded face remained that of a stranger. He slipped from his horse and in a shrill, chirrupy voice admitted:

"You're dead right, mister, I'm Charlie Pottle of Ryansville. But darned if I can place you."

With a deep laugh Geen advanced with both hands outstretched.

"Look sharp, you little rat," he commanded. "Mean to say you don't know me, even with these whiskers on?"

Pottle puckered his brows, then yelped with delight and seized Geen's hands and pumped them up and down.

"Dave Geen, you big ox! Well, of all things! Them whiskers plumb fooled me. And meeting up like this down on the edge of the Injun Nation!"

"And seeing you coming up from the Nation!" broke in Geen. "It's the beatenist thing I ever herd tell."

"And the last time I saw you was the day the teacher licked me and you chipped in so's I could scoot through the winder—

"*Kingbird*," *copyright*, 1927, *by Hugh Pendexter*.

Once They Had Played at Sheriff and Badman

What? What?" He dropped Geen's hands and stared at the small badge pinned on the flannel shirt.

"The badge? Yes, sirree. I'm the sheriff," acknowledged Geen.

Pottle had to shake hands again; and cried admiringly:

"Doggone! Might 'a' known you'd go and do it sometime, somewhere. You always played you was the sheriff in our games. Prob'ly because you was the biggest lummox in the village. Always the sheriff, busy hounding desp'rate outlaws. And here you be, with a truly-goodness badge on!"

"Squat down here and talk!" roared Geen, his big hand fondly patting Pottle's shoulder, "I'll picket your nag."

"Hoss won't wander any. You've made quite a waller on the grass already." And Pottle threw himself down on his back and clasped his hands back of his head and urged, "Now tell me things."

Geen dropped beside him, and demanded:

'Where'd you go when you pulled out of Ryansville? You quit town first. You talk first. Where you been? What you been doing these dozen years? I can't get over meeting you here! And won't Annie be surprized!"

Pottle stared round-eyed at his boyhood playmate, and mumbled:

"Dave Geen, sheriff. Wearing a badge like all git-out. Packing two guns, just as he used to pack wooden ones." Then he ruffled his scant thatch of yellow hair and said more soberly, "Annie? Annie Bent, of course."

Geen grinned and corrected:

"Annie Geen. Married me and come out here and has stuck like a Trojan through some mighty slim pickings."

Pottle came to a sitting posture and plucked idly at the grass and murmured:

"Of course. You two was made for one t'other. She knew you'd make good. Big feller like you can't help making good. No one can shove you around. If I'd had your beef, the teacher wouldn't tried to lick me that day, and I'd prob'ly stuck to Ryansville. Well, well, you've certainly had the luck, Dave, to git a girl like Annie Bent."

He fell silent. Geen filled his pipe, then stuffed it back in his shirt pocket and mumbled:

"Charlie, I'm not always a hero. I'm a big jump from it just now. I'd never say as much to any living soul but you."

"Bosh!" Then apprehensively, "But you've treated Annie all right, ain't you?"

"Good land! As if any one would ever want to treat Annie bad. Nothing like that, Charlie. Let me tell you. We come out here to Kansas in '81. Come to Caldwell. Wildest town on the border. You had to have guts to live there—with the prettiest woman in Kansas for your

wife. We was poor as Job's turkey, but I worked and worked and got ahead a bit. I found no one wanted to shove me around if I held my head up and my chin out. I was deputy under Mike Meagher."

"Served under Meagher! Why, I heard tell about him down in the Nation. He killed a feller named Powell and then was killed by Powell's cousin, Jim Talbot. But go on. Now you're a sheriff as big as Billy-be— Tell the rest."

"I ain't trying to tell all I've done out here, Charlie. I'm working up to confessing something. We moved to Medicine Lodge, and two years ago I was made sheriff. Still keeping my head up and chin out."

"Of course you'd be sheriff. You always was that in all our games. I was always the desp'rate cuss who got caught."

"Shut up. I'm trying to confess something. And it ain't easy to do. Three months ago we got word Annie's old bachelor uncle had died—"

"Old Sawdust!" interrupted Pottle. "Always reckoned he'd live forever to save the cost of a burying. Old Sawdust cashed in. Well, who cares? He never had a smile for any one."

Geen frowned slightly and explained:

"He left all his property to Annie. She's a rich woman. We're going back to Iowy and I'm going to manage her property."

He paused and fumbled for his pipe, but did not take it from the pocket.

"I can't see no shame in that. Only decent thing Old Sawdust ever done," mused Pottle. "Of course you'll look after her property, being her husband. If you'd stay out here you'd double in no time. In a year or so they'll open that pretty stretch in the Nation the redskins call Oklahoma. With ready cash, and being johnny-on-the-spot—"

"No, no, Charlie. We've decided to go back East. Annie never liked out here."

Pottle's gaze rested dreamily on the range of low hills in the southwest. In a low voice he said:

"I can see the town now, Dave. Sleepy. Almost death-struck. We used to see who'd hear the first frogs singing in the spring. All the roads lined with trees. Make a hoss feel sleepy just to jog along in the shade. Well, well. I'm mooning. Why shouldn't you go back? Nothing to confess in doing that. If I hadn't been so undersized and onery I'd prob'ly be living there today. We keep gitting off the trail. You was going to tell me something—how I used to break my small back building sod'n' ditch fences! And frost-bitten roasting ears! I can almost taste 'em now—Old gander leading the wild geese giving his call high in the sky. Wind moaning through the trees in late fall—"

"Shut up! Good land, Charlie, how can I get along if you keep that up? It's hard enough anyway."

Then Geen was silent again and tugged at his beard. This time Pottle kept silent. Geen groaned, said:

"You're the only person on God's green footstool I'd say it to, Charlie—Annie's the last one I'd tell—I'm afraid."

Geen averted his face. Pottle sagged backward until he rested on his elbows. Bewilderment and incredulity stared from his small eyes. After a count of five he querulously cried—

"I can't git the right slant of it!"

Keeping his face turned toward the creek, Geen pulled up long grass stalks and slowly explained:

"It's Old Sawdust's property that done it. When we was poor I was always keen to take any chance. That's how I got to be sheriff. That's why I got the name of the 'Fighting Sheriff.' Ready to stand up against any odds. Had only my life to lose. Always felt luck was with me—Now it's vastly different."

"But ain't you quick as ever with your irons?" shrilly demanded Pottle.

Geen ceased plucking the wild grass and stared for a bit toward the low range of hills. His voice lacked vibration, life, when he finally said:

"It's deeper'n that. You prob'ly won't catch what I mean. Of a sudden I find I'm mighty precious to myself. So much to live for."

"But you've always had Annie, and have her now," reminded Pottle sharply.

Geen nodded slowly several times and agreed:

"Yes, I've had her as my sweetheart back in Ryansville. I've had her out here to meet me when I come back from a long ride, when I was fetching in a prisoner, or a dead man tied to a hoss. Now there's the property to enjoy along of her. If I stop a hunk of lead it means I've not only lost my life, but seventy-five thousand dollars and a life of ease and happiness with Annie. Why should I run any more chances of being brought home, slung across a hoss like a bag of meal?"

Pottle sucked in his thin cheeks with an explosive sound, and said fiercely:

"All right. Play it that way. But why tell folks about it? Why ain't you back in Iowy, hogging your luck? What's to hinder? The trail's open. And just what'n —— do you mean, anyhow, Dave?"

Geen kept his gaze on the hills, three miles away, and refused to meet his companion's boring scrutiny. Squaring his shoulders as if to withstand a physical shock, he bluntly confessed:

"The property's made a coward of me, Charlie. Fate's waited till this property was dumped into our laps before arranging for me to git myself rubbed out. I know it! And if I'd only quit office a few days ago it would have been all right! But I thought I'd hang on till I was leaving for Iowy. Then Fate sprung the trap. A few days ago the Curt Smith gang robbed the Cass Town bank, killed the cashier and wounded a citizen. Smith'n' his men rode off with seventy thousand dollars. After that happened I couldn't quit."

"You quit? The Fighting Sheriff quit? I'd like to meet the man who'll dare say as much!"

"But I want to quit, Charlie. There's the shame of it. I'm 'mazed to finding myself telling you this."

Pottle laughed uneasily and said:

"Reason's plain enough. You feel free to tell me because I'm an undersized runt. I don't count. It used to gruel me, but I got used to it. Even in the old days I was always the feller who was chased and always got caught'n' put in prison. One of 'Old Sawdust's' henhouses was our prison."

"That's not it at all, Charlie," protested Geen. "It's because you're my friend from the old town."

"Putting salve on the little feller's feelings. Well, let it go that way. Now you've talked right out in meeting, I've found nerve enough to tell something I'd never tell any one but you: I used to be crazy about Annie Bent when we was younkers back in Ryansville. No one knew it. I was a runt and knew I didn't ever stand any show. I didn't mind being licked that day by the teacher. I did mind most mortal to have Annie see him lam me and to know she was pitying me. So I dug out. There! I've matched your card. Your bacon's burning. Pull it off the fire. Here's the guts of our talk—gang busted a bank and you wanted to quit. But you couldn't quit and you ain't quit. Why be ashamed?"

"I haven't quit," slowly agreed Geen. "I started trailing the gang. If my hoss hadn't stumbled and thrown me, and hurt my arm, it would be all over by this time." And he nodded gloomily toward the low range. "And there's the notion burning in my brain, like a oil-lamp in a winder, that I'm sure to be killed if I go into those hills. I know it. It's the trap Fate has set for me. Git myself killed just because folks have the notion a sheriff must always go ahead against all odds."

"But you being here on this crick shows you have the strongest, simon-pure brand of courage," insisted Pottle. "You ain't to blame if your hoss tossed you and hurt your arm so's to make you slow with a gun. Who's in the gang? How many? I've been in Texas, this country's new to me."

"Texas? Then you've heard of 'Kingbird.' It's said he was with Curt Smith. Gawd, Charlie! If I went into those hills

that Texas hellion is sure to wipe me out."

Pottle burst into a cackling laugh of derision.

"Kingbird rub you out! Then it would be because you're blind, 'n' deef. Funny how folks will build up a big name for a man. That Kingbird's mostly a bluff. Another thing, he ain't up here. Chased down into Old Mexico. How many in the Smith band?"

"Five."

"Then first 'n' last'n' all the time you, or any other sheriff, would be crazy in the head to ride into such a nest alone. Where's your posse?"

Geen stroked his beard and wearily explained:

"Afraid to fetch one along. I'm telling you everything. I'm afraid I might show I was scared if I had any men along."

"Uh-huh? Five of 'em."

"Trail split a mile back. Two swung wide to the west—probably to cut up the chase. Well, Charlie, you hold northeast for twenty miles and you'll bump into Medicine Lodge. Go to my house. Annie will put you up. She always liked you as a younker; you was always that grinning and good-natured. Keep her mind off me till I come back, or am brought back. I must always be the Fighting Sheriff to her."

"Yeah. Fine. Let's have a look at your arm."

And without waiting for permission Pottle rolled up the right shirt-sleeve.

"Probably won't show much. The hurt seems to be in the bone," hastily said Geen.

Pottle stared at the heavily muscled shoulder. He could discover no sign of a hurt. He lowered his gaze as he turned away and said—

"Seems to be swelling fast."

He squatted and pulled at the grass and kept his gaze directed toward the hills. He did not believe Geen would ride into the outlaws' lair once he was left alone. Still staring into the southwest, he began insisting:

"Time the sun goes down you'll be slower'n cold molasses with the right-hand gun. I can't figger out why Annie should be made a widder just because you're foolish. Never git yourself killed to prove you're brave. Now here's what we'll do: I'm too onery'n' small to hold attention. But because I'm undersized and used to being put upon I'm like a weasel in smartness. Now I can enter the hills and, if they're there, look 'em over without being seen. Then I'll ride back here 'n' report. Then you can send for a posse or, if your arm's better, go back with me and out-Injun 'em. If they've passed through the hills the chase is ended so far as you're concerned. And you can quit the job without being ashamed."

"If Annie knew what I've told you, or ever got the notion I held back—"

"What she don't know won't hurt her," snapped Pottle. "She sure would think you was a fine fool to toss your life away to a band of low-down cowardly murderers. I'm going to do some spying before it gits dark."

He was on his feet. Geen also rose and protested:

"It ain't reg'lar. A sheriff never should hold back and let an outsider do the trailing. We'll wait till morning—"

"No, I'm going. I'm free born 'n' white. You stay here, and nurse your arm. Mighty little for me to do for the sake of the old days when you used to save me from being licked by the older boys. You was a prime fool to come down here alone."

"It ain't reg'lar for an outsider—"

"I'm an insider," interrupted Pottle. "Swear me as a reg'lar. Swear in my hoss—only be spry about it. I'm going anyway."

More than ever did Geen fear his activities would end in the hills if the outlaws were there. If they were gone the chase was ended. Shame had sent him this far on a one-sided errand. Ryansville appealed as being very beautiful. Nothing to worry one there, especially if he possessed Old Sawdust's money.

Then there was the fiction about his arm. He could legitimately profit by it, now he had told the lie. And there could be no danger to Charlie Pottle, who would reconnoiter from a distance. In the old days playing Injun none could compete with young Pottle when it came to slyness.

Pottle whistled and the big roan promptly came toward him. Geen fumbled in a pocket and fished out a small silver badge. He said earnestly:

"If I thought there was any danger in this for you, Charlie, I'd never permit it. But you've convinced me I'm a fool not to take every advantage in trailing that outfit. You're to keep under cover and take no risks. If you fail to see a light or smoke, you'll know they're gone and you'll come back at once. Hold up your right hand."

Pottle slowly repeated the oath and the badge was pinned to his shirt. Then Geen reminded him—

"You haven't any gun."

And he started to pull one of his own, but Pottle backed away, explaining:

"I sha'n't need any gun. If I do I've got one in my blanket-roll. But I ain't carrying any fight to that gang. Slop some crick-water on that arm'n' shoulder to stop the swelling. Be back in the morning. Maybe tonight, but don't think so. Don't fret."

Agile as a monkey he scrambled to the back of the big roan. He nodded a farewell with the same vacuous grin that always characterized him in Ryansville, and forded the creek and rode for the hills.

IN ANCIENT times great pockets were scooped from the sides of the hills. Some of these pockets, accessible from the plains, had almost perpendicular walls and contained deep pools. They were so many culs-de-sac. Pottle made several false starts before finding a path which promised to lead him over the crest of the range. The western sky was old gold and rose when he dismounted and led the roan through a stretch of broken ground. Twilight had changed to dusk when a well defined trail brought him clear of the rocks and to a fringe of trees along the rim of a shallow amphitheater. At the foot of a gentle slope were several houses of logs and sod. There was the aroma of wood-smoke. A horse whinnied. A blob of light suddenly appeared in one of the houses.

Pottle took a broad leather belt and two guns from his blanket roll and shifted the badge from his shirt to the inside of his big hat. Leading the roan he proceeded down the slope without any pretense at secrecy. The light vanished.

"Hi, the house!" he shouted. "Show that light so's I can see where I'm going."

A gun clicked on his right and a low voice announced—

"Stranger, you're going to —— a-fluking if you can't give a good reason for being here."

Pottle quickly replied:

"I'm a stranger from Texas. Give me some grub and a snort of liquor before you do any shooting."

"Keep on down to the first house. I'll be close behind you."

"My hoss ain't done nothing. Don't shoot him," requested Pottle, as he resumed the descent.

Behind him scuffed the boots of his captor. When close to the house a voice commanded—

"Stand where you are."

"I've got him covered, Curt," called out the man in the rear. "Seems to be alone."

"Mebbe a trap," growled Curt. "One of you boys make a light inside."

Pottle remained motionless until a lighted lantern was taken into the house. Then came the command:

"Clasp your hands back of your neck and walk inside."

Pottle did as bid and turned the corner of the house and entered the lighted room. He could hear men taking positions so as to scrutinize him through the small hole of a window of the open door.

Suddenly one of the unseen burst into a guffaw of laughter, and exclaimed:

"The guns! See the rat's guns! Bigger'n he is."

Three men came through the doorway and stared at him curiously. The leader a tall, slim man, was the first to speak. He told Pottle:

"We don't know how you happen to come here. We'll prob'ly have to leave you here for the next feller to find. But you're sure funny to look at, stranger."

Grinning good-naturedly Pottle explained:

"Been running away from Texas. Run clean through the Injun Nation. These hills looked likely for a hiding-place till I could rest and git the lay of the land. As to rubbing me out, any one with the drop can do that. But what's the p'int? You're strangers to me, so there can't be bad blood between us. I'm striking north to make Nebraska. Just what chance is there for a bite to eat and drink of liquor while you folks are deciding what you'll do with me?"

The leader made a gesture, and the man behind Pottle yanked the heavy guns from the broad belt. Then the leader explained:

"I'm Curt Smith, boss of this outfit. Mebbe you've heard of me down in Texas."

"Met a thousand Smiths down there. You're some punkins up here, I take it."

"I'm boss in these hills. You can put your hands down. Squat in the corner and tell who you be and how you come to quit Texas and be —— sudden about it," savagely ordered Smith. Then to one of the men—

"Hanks, fetch some bacon'n' beans'n' a drink."

"I'll bet he's Billy the Kid come to life," jeered Hanks as he slipped through the door.

Pottle dropped in a corner and smiled good-naturedly at the tall leader. He gave his name and explained:

"Been living down on the Trinity and other places in Texas. Couldn't agree with a marshal. They're saying I rubbed him out. I quit on the jump."

"Never heard of no powder-burner by the name of Pottle," said the leader.

"Texas is a big place. Down there we don't hear much about you folks up here."

For nearly a minute Smith lowered at him in silence, then he asked the third man:

"Ever see him or hear of him before, Tusk?"

Tusk shook his shaggy head. For emphasis he said—

"If he'd ever crossed my path I'd either overlook him or remember him—he's that onery."

Smith told Pottle:

"I allow you're a lying little runt. Don't believe you ever hurt anybody, let alone shooting a marshal."

Chuckling softly, Pottle corrected:

"Never let on I'd killed any marshal. I said that's what Texas folks is saying."

"Chief, I don't believe he's even hefty enough to swing one of them big guns," said Tusk, as his gaze dwelt on the huge dragon Colt revolvers—too heavy and awkward for a man to carry unless mounted on a horse.

Pottle plucked at his fuzzy yellow beard and asked—

"Ain't none of you reckoning that such an onery critter could be a law-officer?"

Smith smiled and promptly replied—

"No, I'll be —— if any of us can think that."

"And you'd never pick me for a feller to come in search of this outfit, would you?"

"Not if you knew Curt Smith," grimly replied the leader. Then he significantly reminded him. "But you've stumbled on to us. That's bad."

"Mebbe it's good," said Pottle. "This whole business seems as plain as my face to me. I come into these hills by chances. You ain't law-officers. You ain't a posse out hunting for my kind. Then you must be my kind. You don't know anything about me, and I don't know anything about you. I ain't asking to be took on yet. I sure ain't honing to throw in with an outfit till I know it's got the fighting guts. But there's no earthly reason why you should want to rub me out."

"So you're fussy about the company

you keep," sneered Smith. "You've got to pick'n choose. You must be some fine hellion."

"It ain't for me to do any bragging while I'm waiting to be fed and, mebbe, rubbed out," Pottle replied quietly. "If I hadn't run into you I'd 'a' rested my hoss, took a long sleep and started for Nebraska. I'd 'a' stopped just long enough to call on some bank and git some money."

"As simple as that?" jeered Smith.

"Well, ain't that what banks are for?"

And Pottle grinned ingratiatingly.

Smith stared at him curiously. Tusk's eyes blazed ferociously. Smith slowly remarked:

"Mighty queer you should begin talking about robbing banks. A queer brand of talk for a man to make to strangers."

Pottle replied evenly:

"Mebbe I've guessed the wrong card. But even in Kansas they can't jail a man for letting on he'd stop to get money from a bank. Mebbe I meant I would borrer it."

At this point Hanks returned with a frying pan of hot beans and bacon and a jug. Smith said:

"Fill up, stranger. Rest of the talk can wait a bit."

Pottle's eyes gleamed as he reached for the food. He used a short sheath knife as a fork. Between hungry mouthfuls he tipped the jug and drank generously. He appeared to be wolfishly hungry. Smith at last admonished—

"We didn't fetch a distill'ry along, stranger."

"You've guzzled enough to eat a hole through a copper kettle," growled Tusk.

"I could drink the whole jug and never roll an eye," boasted Pottle.

The three men waited patiently. At last he had finished the food. He leaned back against the logs and sighed contentedly, and said—

"Brother Hanks, when it comes to bacon'n' beans fixin's you're a prime dabster."

Smith told Hanks—

"Stay here and see he don't budge from that corner." He walked to the door, motioning Tusk to follow him outside. The two voices were audible but Pottle could not understand what was being talked. Hanks leaned against the wall, his thumbs hooked in his belt, and lazily informed him:

"Chief's trying to decide what he'll do with you. Sort of bad luck you should come mousing in here."

"Mousing? Didn't I hoot the minute I saw the light?"

"I'm reckonin' it's bad luck for somebody just the same." Tusk came through the doorway and jerked his head significantly. Hanks went outside. Pottle asked Tusk—

"How'd you vote?"

"We ain't voted yet—just talked. We feel you're too onery to be of any help. But mebbe you could do lots of mischief if we let you go and you went to Medicine Lodge or Cass Town and told what you knew."

"But I don't know nothing. Medicine Lodge? What's that — Injun village? Never in Kansas before."

"It's a town."

"Let's drink its health."

He started to reach for the jug. Tusk covered him quickly and commanded—

"First, throw over that knife."

Pottle pulled the knife and tossed it to stick in a log under the eaves. It was a neat cast. Tusk smiled slightly.

"Now you can drink. You're a funny little cuss. Packing them big guns! Just what is your game?"

Pottle finished a pull at the jug. He smacked his lips and replied:

"Running away from Texas is my business just now. How goes the voting, Mister Smith?"

The last was occasioned by the abrupt entrance of the leader. Smith ignored the question and asked—

"How much money have you in your jeans, stranger?"

"Five hundred dollars. Git some cards and dig up some money and we'll play for it."

"We don't have to play cards for your

money," Smith told him. "We can't just figger you out. You ain't sizable enough to be dangerous. Yet you seem to be too come-uppity for a man who ain't used to trouble. We might take on another man if we was sure of him. Two men quit us a short time ago. But we don't know you from a buffler-hide."

Pottle quickly assured him:

"I'm used to more simon-pure trouble than any man you ever see. I'm in something of the same fix you be, I'm keen to throw in with the right outfit. Too bad we don't know more about each other. Of course I can't afford to hitch up with the wrong outfit. Never heard of any of you boys before. On t'other hand, only the most likely ones up here ever make an echo down in Texas."

"—— your blab! You talk gentle. Just who the —— be you? You brag tall enough for a mountain—and you're the size of a wart."

Pottle puffed out his cheeks and asked quietly—

"Any of you ever hear of a Texas galoot called Kingbird?"

The three came to sharp attention. Smith said:

"We've heard quite a bit about Kingbird. What of it?"

Pottle sighed and answered—

"Probably won't do much good for me to say it, but I used to ride with Kingbird."

"You little liar!" growled Smith.

"No, sirree, I ain't no liar! I'd be with Kingbird now if he hadn't lit out for Old Mexico. There's prime reasons why I can't cross the Rio. Liar, eh? See here, Mister Smith, I may be standing waist-deep in my grave, but give me a knife or a gun and meet me alone and you'll swaller what you called me, or this outfit will need a new leader."

Smith was surprized by the little man's defiance. After a few moments he smiled tolerantly and said:

"You wouldn't make a mouthful. If I knew you ever rode with Kingbird you'd be good enough for us. Well, we'll go into the bunk-house and sleep on it. We're pulling out in the morning. You'll either go with us or stay behind."

"Couldn't do both," grumbled Pottle. "But I know what you mean."

Hanks and Tusk hooked their arms through the prisoner's, and Smith brought up the rear with a drawn gun. Hanks had left a lantern burning after procuring the beans and bacon and, as the four men entered, Pottle glanced curiously at the twelve bunks and inquired—

"Where's the rest of your boys?"

"All right here. Henry Brown used to hide up here after Billy the Kid was wiped out. Brown used to ride with the Kid. Trying to make this place when he was caught in a pocket on the east side of the hills."

"I remember about Brown, along of his riding with the Kid," softly said Pottle. "He was hung for some bank holdup. This place must be chuck full of fond mem'ries. I remember now that Brown had men in his outfit who went off half-cocked. That proves what I said about a man can't affording to throw in with a weak outfit. One weak critter will sp'ile everything. Brown must 'a' been all right to ride with the Kid, but some of his men had a yaller streak or got crazy in the head."

"Oh, you talk too —— much. Close your trap and turn in. This bunk under the lantern. Or the floor. We ain't going to tie you up. One of the boys will be on guard all the time. Make a move and it'll be your last. Trouble with you Texas fellers is you reckon you're the whole thing. Kansas breeds better men every year."

"Well, Kingbird is the whole thing in his line. I rode with him," insisted Pottle.

"Shut up! Open your yawp again and I'll bend the bar'el of a gun over your peanut head!" roared Smith. "If you didn't talk so —— much there'd be a chance of us trying you out."

This time Pottle kept silent. Smith was still muttering angrily as the prisoner chose the dirt floor and spread a blanket and composed himself for the night. The

lantern flooded him with light. Throwing an arm over his head to shut out some of the light, he pretended to sleep. The three men did not talk, as two turned in and the third stood watch.

Pottle slept for short stretches. Each time he awoke he found the man on watch very alert and with a cocked gun in his lap. During his periods of wakefulness Pottle considered his situation and was confident he had won. He had irritated Smith, but a certain amount of boasting had been necessary to make the desired impression. And a man claiming to have followed Kingbird was sure to brag. In the morning he would shift to earnestness. He was confident he could overcome Smith's irritation. If he could secure a gun and catch them off their guard for the fraction of a minute the trick would be turned. Well satisfied with himself and confident of success, he slept heavily near morning.

The sun was up when Smith stirred him with his boot. Pottle rubbed his eyes and said:

"Clear and sunshiny. I'm hungrier'n a wolf."

Smith eyed him soberly. There was something feral in the steady gaze. Pottle regretted he had not been awake early to try and influence the final verdict. He was not surprized when Smith slowly told him:

"Sunshine is all right. But you oughter be more interested in what we've voted to do with you."

"If you mean business and got something likely in sight I'll throw in with you," said Pottle.

"Like —— you will! Your blabbing has riled the boys. You're either a windbag, or else you're so —— good you'd be trying to boss this outfit inside of a week. Last night we couldn't decide. This morning we all see it one way. You're going to be left behind."

Pottle met his gaze squarely, and after a bit of silence he said quietly:

"I see. Can I eat first?"

"Hank will fetch you some grub and a drink, if you feel that way."

Smith started to leave him, then turned back as if feeling the need of justifying his decision. Pottle believed he could change the verdict. He kept quiet and Smith explained:

"We've made a killing. We don't plan another job till we've had some fun out of the money we've got. We can't share it with a new man, and it's better not to take on another man till we're ready to work. Either you're all wool like what you claim and would foller and make trouble for us, or else you're just filled to the chin with talk and will keep shooting off your mouth and make it bad for us—we can't decide which. But whatever you be, you stay behind. Hanks, hurry along the grub and whisky. Tusk, git the hosses ready."

Hanks deposited the food and jug on the floor before the prisoner. The latter asked:

"You can't mean to kill me, Brother Hanks? Not right on top of feeding me?"

"You come here without being asked. You've talked tall and wide. You ask for grub and a drink. There they be. This outfit runs no risk of losing a big bunch of money by trying any 'speriments with you."

Pottle had hoped to catch Hanks by the ankles when he brought the food, but Smith, with a gun loose, discouraged any such maneuver. Never were the little man's ears and eyes more alert. Hanging from a bunk, close to where Smith stood, was the broad belt and the two big guns. From the corner of his eye Pottle hungered for them. As he ate he slowly worked his heels under him. He was lifting the jug when Tusk, outside, loudly called:

"What about the big roan? Kill him or take him with us?"

Smith turned his head a trifle and opened his mouth to answer Tusk. Pottle lifted the jug above his head and hurled it against Smith, and as he did so he whistled shrilly. Smith almost dropped his gun. The big roan gave a terrible scream and plunged for the open

door. Tusk, off one side, began emptying a gun into the maddened horse. Pottle leaped for his guns the moment the jug left his hands. Smith fired and Hanks yelled a warning and jumped into a bunk. Seeing Pottle reel and all but fall, Smith shifted his attention to the doorway and believed the big roan was about to effect an entrance. His second shot, two seconds after the first, struck the roan in the head at a distance of ten feet.

Hanks was yelling wildly. Smith jerked about, discharging his third shot into the dirt floor at Pottle's feet as the latter caught him under the chin with the big bullet. Smith pitched forward on his face. Hanks leaned from the bunk to rake Pottle. The latter beat him by an instant, and Hanks hung over the edge of the bunk, shot through the head. All this occurred inside of thirty seconds.

With his left arm hanging useless Pottle made for the doorway, partly filled by the head and shoulders of the dead roan. Dancing frantically around and waving two guns, Tusk was yelling, "What's up? What's up?"

Then he beheld Pottle, kneeling by the head of the roan. He fired with both guns, shooting wildly. Pottle fired once, and was mechanically blowing the smoke from the long barrel as Tusk wavered and fell.

Dropping the gun, Pottle caressed the big, bony head of his horse and half sobbed:

"You was worth many times their —— money, old friend. You tried to git to me, to help me. You was worth more'n all the money that was ever stole."

A shrill neighing brought him to the alert. He peered around the edge of the door. Then he was climbing over the dead animal to meet Sheriff Geen.

Geen leaped from his mount and stared, wild-eyed, at the silent figure of Tusk. He exclaimed faintly: "My God, Charlie! You've had a fight. I heard guns and come on the gallop."

"Peek inside and you'll allow it was a real fight," groaned Pottle. "They busted my arm afore I could git started. Worst of all, they killed my hoss."

Geen, with cocked gun, advanced through the doorway and looked about. The room was acrid with the reek of burned powder. He saw the man sprawling on the floor and another leaning out of the bunk as if trying to reach the revolver on the dirt.

"Three!" gasped Geen as he mopped the sweat from his face.

"They killed my hoss," dully reminded Pottle! "He was worth more'n all the money."

"Charlie Pottle! Little Pottle! To think you did for the three of them!" whispered Geen.

"They went and killed my hoss," sniveled Pottle.

Geen conquered his runaway nerves and set about improvising a splint and a sling. The bone of the upper arm was broken. Finishing with Pottle the sheriff started to search the bunk-house. Pottle called after him—

"Fetch out my hat."

Geen soon brought out the hat and a sack of money.

"Some twenty thousand dollars short," he announced as he finished counting the loot.

"That's what the two missing men took away with 'em. Here's your badge."

Geen pocketed it and said—

"Now to get you to town and a doctor."

Pottle stared at his dead horse and asked—

"How you going to manage it, Dave?"

"You can ride a horse. I see three grazing. We'll take it easy."

"But how'd you come here, Dave? You was to wait till I'd done some spying."

"God forgive me for ever letting you come, Charlie. I'm punished as never a man was before. Early this morning I saw myself a coward and quitter. Shame spurred me here as fast as my hoss could make it. And I got here too late to take part and win any credit. All Kansas will know I sent a new deputy where I wouldn't go myself. Well, that's my medicine and I must take it. Facing Annie is the hardest of all."

"Annie never wanted you to get killed."

"Oh, she'll try to cover up. But this day's work will always be in the back of her head."

"Well, of all the no-account talk," jeered Pottle. "Sling those three men on their hosses and then take me up behind you. Here, let me look at your gun for a bit."

And before Geen could guess his purpose Pottle had it clear of the holster and was shooting at the sky. Replacing the weapon, he told the astounded official:

"There you be. You rode in here with your old playmate, tagging along behind, and shot it out with 'em. My hoss was killed and I got plugged the first card out of the box. You done all the shooting and fetched your old friend home. Load my guns and roll 'em with the belt in the blankets."

"It's cruel! It's wretched that you—"

"That's your suffering, if you enjoy it," interrupted Pottle. "Annie comes first. Don't be a fool. Who've I got to make proud by my shooting? Fetch out the jug, then Mister Smith and Brother Hanks and all their guns. I'll empty a few shots from their irons. No one will ever know, and you'll have the proudest wife what ever was."

GEEN resigned as sheriff and won a rare reputation for modesty. He discouraged praise and refused to listen to his wife's adulation. His affairs were in order, but he would not leave Kansas until Pottle was fully recovered. That insignificant victim of outlaw lead mended rapidly and continued a guest at the Geen home. It was torture to Geen when people insisted on proclaiming him a hero. More than once he was tempted to tell the truth but Pottle fiercely argued that Mrs. Geen alone counted. Her peace of mind must not be disturbed.

"Look at it this way," he would say, "no man but a crazy coot would ride into them hills alone in the night. I did, thinking I could do some spying. I was caught. My hoss saved me. You come on the jump in early morning. If I'd kept my fingers out the dish you'd been in time to corral the three of them. So you wa'n't a coward."

"I even lied about hurting my arm," Geen would groan.

"What you felt and said and did the day before the shooting is all wiped off the slate by your riding into the hill hellyterlarrup early next morning. You'd be worse'n a coward—you'd be a skunk to fret your wife."

One day Mrs. Geen told her husband:

"Your loyalty to any friend from the old town is fine, David, but you wait on Charlie as if he were both child and invalid. He can use his arm. He told me this morning it's all right now. Can't we be going home?"

"Yes. Charlie's going away soon to look at some land. I'll tell you something you never knew about the little shaver, Annie. He was head over heels in love with you when we were in school together."

"What nonsense!" She started to laugh at the absurdity of it; then found something very pathetic in the undersized figure sitting near the road.

"Of course I never dreamed such a thing, David. I'm sorry. You've finished your work out here. You'll always be remembered as the Fighting Sheriff. And I can't get back to Iowy too quick."

He winced under her words and turned his head.

"I asked Charlie to go with us," he told her awkwardly.

A little frown came and went. Then she was smiling and nodding her head, and saying:

"What you think best is always best, dear. We will make him welcome. Only I wish you'd never told me that bit of boyish nonsense."

"He refused to go back with us. That's why I could tell you. He knows we are leaving soon. His arm is as good as new. Now I'll tell him we start in three days."

His wife went out with him. Pottle heard Geen name the date of departure, smiling whimsically, his small, bright

eyes darting from husband to wife. Mrs. Geen felt a sudden great pity as she contrasted his lonely lot with their happiness. She urged generously—

"Go back with us, Charlie, please."

"Thank you, Annie, but they might make me return to school or give me a licking for running away." And he laughed loudly at the notion. Then seriously, "In three days? That'll be Thursday morning. Dave knows I'm going land-looking. But I'll be back before you two pull out. Prob'ly just as you're catching the train. That hoss you give me, Dave, is a humdinger; but he never can come up to the roan."

He rode away that day, and before night a committee of citizens waited on Geen and offered him any political preferment within the gift of southwestern Kansas. His wife scolded him, after the committee departed, for his lack of appreciation. His face was pale under the tan as he listened to her and his attempt at a smile was a grimace. She never could know the hell he visualized as the committee talked and compelled him to see himself in the National House, and winning the honor because of Charlie Pottle's heroism. Nor could she know how he counted the hours until they were walking to the station to take the train.

He braced himself to listen to more encomiums, for the town had turned out to bid him Godspeed. With drawn face he listened to the local orators and wondered whether it never would be train-time. Curiously enough his wife broke down and wept at the thought of going away.

At last the conductor was shouting "All aboard!" and the Geens were free to mount the back platform for final hand-waving and farewells. Geen smiled and gestured mechanically and stared eagerly over the heads of the people and hoped against hope that Charlie Pottle would return in time. Then he saw Pottle riding like mad and whipping his horse as if his life depended on his reaching the train. Geen leaned down and seized the conductor by the shoulder and insisted:

"Hold her for a minute. My best friend, little Charlie Pottle, is coming on a dead gallop."

Those who heard this wondered why Pottle should be held as "best friend." The conductor nodded and studied his watch. Geen, on the platform, watched Pottle swing to the ground on the edge of the crowd. He surrendered his horse to a man and handed him a piece of paper. Geen shouted to him to hurry. Then he laughed softly and told his wife:

"I'll bet he's sold the horse. The paper was a bill of sale. See? He's fetching his belongings in a bag. He's going through with us. Hurrah, Charlie! Hustle your boots."

Grinning widely, Pottle burrowed his way through the mass of humanity and mounted the steps. Having no friends to bid farewell to, he went inside. The train was clear of the town when the Geens joined him.

"I'm so glad you're going back with us, Charlie," said Mrs. Geen.

"No. Not this time, Annie. Just going a short distance with you. Gitting out at Pixley. Sent a telegraph message to a feller, who ought to be waiting there to take me to look at some cheap land south of Pixley."

"But that's only a telegraph station, Charlie. Train doesn't stop unless flagged," said Geen.

"I allowed you could fix it, Dave."

Mrs. Geen smiled at this trust in her husband's ability to do things. Geen conferred with the conductor and was told:

"Against the rules for this particular train. But the man who cleaned out the Smith crowd deserves any accommodation the road can give. As we won't be flagged except in an emergency you have Pottle on the steps to drop off when we slow down."

During the few miles to Pixley the three chatted over old times, with Charlie Pottle whimsically recalling some ludicrous incidents. The conductor came up the aisle and nodded for Pottle to be ready, as no flag was out. Pottle bid Annie good-by and carried his bag to the

lower step. Geen stood above him, patting his shoulder fondly. Charlie twisted his head for a farewell glance, and grinned. As the train slowed down Geen knew Pottle's message had been received, as a man and three horses were waiting at the end of the platform.

Pottle dropped off and threw his bag over a horse and, mounted and, with a flourish of his hand to the Geens, was off, the three horses galloping rapidly. As the train began to increase its speed the telegraph operator emerged, waving a slip of paper, and raced forward. As he handed it over to the conductor he shouted:

"Come few seconds too late. Am notifying next station."

The conductor read the telegram, his mouth agape. Turning to Geen on the step above him, he cried excitedly:

"You missed the biggest chance of your whole life! Cass Town bank's robbed for the second time. That Pottle feller got the money you got back from the Smith gang. Had all the loot in his bag, right under your nose! Had a pal planted in Pixley with horses. Pixley operator got the message just too late for you to nab him."

If Geen had been on the lower step he might have fallen from the train. His amazement stunned him. The conductor gestured for him to get back on the platform. Once there, and with the conductor at his side, he gasped:

"Little Charlie Pottle a bank-robber? Oh, that's too ridiculous!"

"Little Charlie! That runt is Kingbird! And the West ain't turned out any more dangerous and deadly than him!"

Geen stared foolishly. He became alert as the conductor started to enter the car and spread the news. Seizing the conductor's arm he begged:

"The last favor I'll ever ask of Kansas. Say nothing till we've changed trains. I want to keep it from my wife. He went to school with us, back in Iowy."

"All right," gruffly promised the conductor. "But of all the bad ones that feller named after the little bird that'll ride a hawk out of a neighborhood, is the worst."

"Not entirely bad," faintly defended Geen. "He keeps his word. He's loyal." Then he stared to the south where three specks, one of them little Pottle, was riding madly to gain the Salt Fork of the Arkansas. He herad himself muttering, "And I was always the sheriff, and he the feller I caught."

He turned and with bowed head went up the aisle. "Why, what's the matter with your eyes, Dave?" she asked.

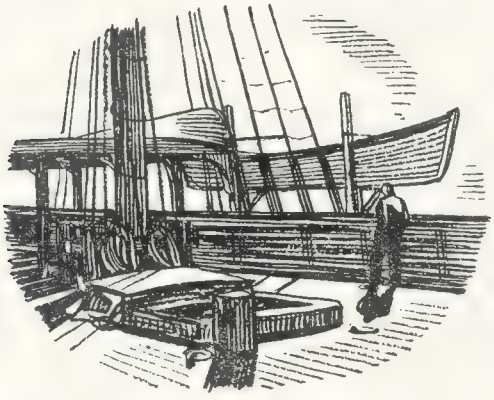
He applied his handkerchief in little dabs and explained—

"Cinders."

Continuing

Wastrel

GORDON YOUNG'S *New Serial of the South Seas*



WOUNDED by natives on a remote island, Dan McGuire was taken to Kialo by young David Brade to recuperate on his father's plantation. McGuire had the reputation of being a lazy beachcomber, yet many men respected him, and Mrs. Brade liked him, as did Susan Fanning who had left her husband in the States to come to Kialo with old Brade's partner.

Fanning, however, hated McGuire with a hate only second to that which he bore Zurdas, the brutal overseer of the neighboring Symonds plantation, who bullied all his neighbors and was planning to marry his negroid imbecile son Manuel to Reena, Symonds' daughter. Rumor said that Reena was not quite sane; certainly she was quietly reserved and very beautiful.

Another woman on the Symonds plantation went crazy, they said, and ran into the bush. Before Zurdas recaptured her she told McGuire her story: She had come out as companion to Reena and had overheard conversations between Zurdas and Symonds which betrayed the fact that Reena was not the planter's daughter, but the child of a man whom Zurdas had killed in Honduras because Symonds had loved Reena's mother. Reena had been only three years old at the time, and no one knew how much she remembered.

McGuire tried to help the woman, but every one thought she was insane; and the next morning he heard that she was dead. Hanged herself, they said.

McGuire made an opportunity to hint to Reena that he knew her story, but he could do nothing to help her. Once he mentioned Honduras to Symonds.

"Great country, Mr. Symonds!" he said to the planter. "You ever been there?"

"Never, McGuire," said Symonds, and indicated that he cared for no further talk.

"*Wastrel*," *copyright*, 1927, *by Gordon Young*.

II

TWO things this year made the race meet memorable. One was that Charley Fanning's mare, ridden by the peak-faced larrikin who had somehow got stranded and put to work on the Brade plantation where, though it was no part of his work, he had shown an understanding of horse flesh, beat old Tomas.

The truth, as it afterward came out, was that the youngster was a jockey of standing who, having used a knife on his employer, had found it advisable to get out of Australia and take another name.

No one except Mrs. Fanning had any idea that the boy was more than an ordinary light-weight rider, and the winning was very like a miracle, astonishing everybody, and nobody more than Dan McGuire who, quite out of sentiments of loyalty to the plantation, had backed the máre, having borrowed the money from Fanning to do it. The odds were tempting but Fanning himself had not risked a dollar, much to his subsequent disgust but far more to that of the woman who had abandoned home and husband to follow him to Kialo.

The savage little larrikin was the most furious of all when he learned that the owner had sent him into the race and not even ventured a wager. Scornfully, in the presence of a grinning crowd, he gave his opinion of such a bad mark as Fanning. The little devil stormed abusively and Fanning had to take it, all of it, though his handsome face grew black and red and pale from the varying colors of anger. The boy was too small to be struck.

The other thing that made great excitement was the thrashing that young David Brade gave Sam Zurdas in full view of the crowd and not twenty feet from the Symonds' carriage where Symonds himself and Miss Reena stood up and watched.

Manuel also had been in the carriage, but, just as he saw the fight was going to start, he jumped out and caught up a picket peg, meaning to use it on the back of Brade's head. But McGuire had put himself close by the carriage, half hoping —almost expecting—that by glance or even hasty word Reena would notice him—and right by the carriage step he stopped Manuel.

McGuire had mild blue eyes but an evil reputation. A look that was not now mild, the reputation and the fact that McGuire's hand was thrust down inside of his shirt where many men concealed knives caused Manuel to stand and tremble in his tracks.

The fight had come about when the elder Zurdas, in a more than ugly mood, made his way along the edge of the crowd to where David stood and, grasping him by the shoulder, with a fist drawn back, said in a loud voice:

"My blackbirder said yesterday that you an' that —— McGuire have told through the islands that I beat niggers to death! He can't get a black off the beach any more. That's how you're tryin' to ruin us, is it? Say no, then I call you a liar! An' I beat you to death, here an' now!"

David answered:

"I tell that and more, ever' chance I get! Men you beat are tied to a post—" and the fight began.

Scarcely a pair of eyes on that part of the track followed the horses that flashed by.

The crowd surged, stormily encircling the men, but those inside the circle pushed back against those who pressed against them, leaving a clear ring. People climbed on one another's shoulders. They jumped into carriages and wagons, jostling the owners. A woman was knocked out of one wagon and another fight started. All manner of yells went up, and hurriedly, the odds on Zurdas, for he was a known man, bets were made.

David thrashed him thoroughly. Though it was not easy work he did it in a way that met with Kialo's approval: toe to toe, blow for blow, being hammered and hammering, so there was none to say luck did it—or skill, which was regarded among the rough overseers and

rougher planters as even more discreditable to a man's victory. This was foot beside foot, with bare knuckles and knotted fists, a thing to try the heart and flesh of man. The fourth time Zurdas was knocked down he got up with the fumbling of a drunken man, swayed unsteadily, glowered as if about to rush, but turned instead and with head down, in silence, pushed staggeringly through the crowd that parted readily and gazed at him with a kind of admiring pity. He had been in many fights on Kialo, for he took the trouble to bring them upon himself, but never before had he been so thoroughly thrashed that all men admitted Zurdas had got the worst of it.

David himself had been knocked down. Some said three times, some twice only, according to how they regarded the time he had gone down, knee and hand to the turf, more as if he had slipped than been put there by a fist.

Now as he stood alone inside the circle, bleeding as if wounded in many places, they closed in. Men thumped his back, grasped his swollen hands, shaking vigorously. They yelped praise at him. They waved their hats with flying arms, cheering.

It was not that Zurdas was so generally disliked. He wasn't, being admired even if rather feared. It was merely that the champion had been overthrown, with something of a crowd's pride too that it had been done by a boy, one who had grown up more or less under their eyes.

David pushed this way and that, trying to get out away from them. His head rang from the beating of Zurdas's fists. He was tired and needed air. The shouting and jostling confused him. In turning about, a little dazed, he looked up as if through the commotion he had heard some one call—looked straight into the dark eyes of Reena who, by the side of Mr. Symonds, standing up in the carriage, had watched every blow and now continued to watch as David trampled about, tormented by his admirers. Under that glance, David, who had known her from afar ever since she was a child, had a vague sensation of guilt. He dropped his eyes, shook the blood from his face as a man shakes off sweat, then, striking right and left with his forearms, pushed half blindly, not knowing nor caring which way he went, but getting out of the crowd.

For a moment Reena's glance followed him a little wonderingly. Then she bent forward and looked down, listening with head turned like an eavesdropper.

Right below her, less than a step away, Manuel stood with the picket peg at his feet and seemed too frightened to move as he stared at that red-headed McGuire who had been the only one to pay no attention to the fight, but seemed to amuse himself by making the half-witted Manuel tremble.

McGuire had a hand thrust inside the shirt and under the cloth the fist seemed closed on the handle of a concealed knife. There was bustle and shouting all about, but she overheard McGuire say with insolent slowness—

"I've got the name of a nigger-lover, so there's no reason why *you* should look so scared."

At that Reena gasped, the insult was complete, so unexpected. Watching, she saw McGuire's hand come out from under the shirt, and in his hand he had not a knife, but a pipe, fist around the bowl.

He stuck it into his wide twisted mouth, grinned at Manuel, turned his back and with insulting unconcern walked away, following his friend Brade.

Mr. Symonds turned and spoke to Reena. She did not notice. He, with just a little surprize that she was smiling, glanced to see whom she watched and saw that her gaze was following that of McGuire. Since the meeting in Benz's store, Mr. Symonds had been wondering about the fellow with increasing mistrust and vague secret uneasiness. But Mr. Symonds now tipped up the ends of his mustache and stood coolly looking out over the excited crowd, because he was being looked at from all sides to see how he took the humiliation of having Zurdas thrashed before his eyes.

III

TWO days later David was ready to start on his trading cruise.

McGuire, who had planned to go, decided to remain on the island. On the deck, an hour or two before sailing, he gave David much absurd advice, all because the boy was easily teased and it amused McGuire to set his brow in a deep pucker and to watch his half anxious expressions. For that matter, few people were able to be sure very often as to just how much McGuire meant by what he said.

"Going right over to Tanna, are you? Heard of a Frenchman who's rarely visited an' think you may be able to do a stroke of business with him? Lots of whites buried on Tanna, or what passes for burial on Tanna. I can be unlucky enough here on Kialo. If the Frenchman's got copra, make him put it on board in bulk, 'cause if it's sacked it'll be half husks. After you get it on board, why then don't pay 'im all you promised 'cause you can know that somehow he's cheated you, so cheat him too. That's the way to get on in the world.

"A Frenchman on Tanna is bound to be drunk. At best he can't live long. No whites live long on Tanna. So in the long run he'll be just as well off if you don't pay him at all. You ought to take Fanning with you a trip or two. He'd show you how to do business with fellows you don't expect to see again.

"If I thought you meant that I'd throw you overboard," said David, grinning a little but meaning what he said. McGuire's levity seemed sometimes too extreme.

"If you do the honest thing on that blank blasted island of Tanna, I'll bet anything you like that when we meet again you'll be cussing the whole French nation! A fellow who's hiding away in a hole like that is there because he has to hide—so look out for 'im."

With that doubtful advice in his ears David went to sea.

IV

McGUIRE on shore with the afternoon before him had nothing better to do—and could have hardly found anything worse—than to go off down the beach to visit a fellow known as Nick who kept a shanty bar and knew all the gossip that drifted about town and down from the plantations.

There were three or four of these shanties in a straggling line between bush and beach. All were dirty as such places devoted to sin, forbidden by law yet tolerated, are likely to be. Toleration was compelled because planters knew they would have even more labor trouble if there were no places where their rough-handed white employees could entertain themselves noisily, and where seamen could roister. So though the grog shops were not supposed to exist they could not be suppressed. Natives were not permitted near them, yet a native girl tended Nick's bar. The law of the island gave her that right, as she was Nick's wife. He had bought her from her parents, marrying her to bind the bargain.

Of these shanties, the first, the one nearest town, was run by a Chinaman. Old Grimes, who in his pleasures seemed to like to get as low as possible, regularly loafed and drank here among slant-eyed coolies.

Nick, fat and wheezy, always short of breath but nevertheless always talking, complained whimperingly that a yellowman's grog shop should be tolerated on Kialo.

"Takin' bread from 'is betters, 'e is!" said Nick.

This afternoon Nick was sitting, with spraddled legs out-thrust, on a keg in the shaded doorway of his shanty.

In daylight, which is to say during working hours, the beach, except for a few stranded beachcombers and such, was deserted; but at night shadows moved stumblingly through the loose sand or defiled out of the near-by bush and, crowding thickly into the huts, took the form of men and made much noise.

Nick rose at the sight of McGuire and with hasty waddling came toward him. Then with an anxious backward glance he said—

"Just the man I wanter see!"

"What 's wrong? Won't Nata let you indoors?"

"Man in there I wanter be rid of!"

"Should have picked an ugly wife, Nick."

"It ain't that. 'E 's worse. I wanter be rid of 'im!"

"Give him a drink. The kind you sell us fellows. Two drinks, then I'll help you carry him out."

"Give 'im nothin'! 'E 's drunk now. Been 'ere—" the whine rose—"since las' night, late las' night. Won't go! Been ragin' an' snortin'. I 'ate men as can't carry liquor like gen'men! Get 'im out f'r me, Dan. Take 'im over to the Chink's, then you come back. I'll give you drink!"

McGuire cocked his head, listening for sounds from the shanty, then—

"Quiet enough in there now."

"But you ort 'ave 'eard 'im! Been talkin' 'bout killin' men. Eyed me as if 'twas me 'e meant! I got out!"

"Shame to scare a man from among his own bottles," said McGuire, looking sympathetic.

Nata peered through the doorway to see who had come. Her hair was loose to her waist, and a dirty loose blue wrapper was half off one shoulder. She waved her hand and grimaced at McGuire.

"Nater!" the jealous husband shouted. "Stop that an' get back!"

"I won't!" she said and came out.

As if he had not at all been disobeyed, Nick asked:

"Z-e sleep?"

She shook her head carelessly, thus answering her husband, coyly eyed McGuire and asked—

"You no like me today, eh?"

"Oh yes, much as ever—when you're out of sight."

Nick had caught her arm. He shouted:

"Nater! Stop that talk!"

She jerked away and turned on him:

"You old fool-head, you! I talk how I want! You say, old fool-head, 'Nata, trade is bad. Grin more at the boys!' Now I try to make him there come in and drink and you say, old fool-head, 'Nata, stoppy that!' "

Thus having enraged her husband, she laughed quickly, threw her bare arms about his neck, fumbled caressingly with his uncombed hair.

"An' she's allus like that," Nick complained a little helplessly, no longer displeased. "I get all set to give 'er a beatin' —then this 'ere! It's 'ard to know wot to do with women. She's been bein' good to 'im in there cause I tol' 'er to leave 'im be. That's why, ain't it, Nater?"

Nata threw her hair about in a vigorous denial, then twisting out of her husband's arms she came near McGuire and rapidly, in native tongue, said:

"This thing—" indicating her husband —"a pig-born man! He that lies in there aye drunk and in anger, is a better man than even thou, though thou art a good man, better than the other pigs who put hands on me when my husband's eyes are turned!"

"Wot's she sayin'?" Nick inquired suspiciously.

"That you are a fool—for being jealous."

The truth was, as McGuire knew, that though Nata was a little contemptuous of these men she rather liked being pawed when her husband's back was turned. She enjoyed the excitement, half despised those who gave it to her.

Such was the way of women, of some women; and such too their way that even she, who was as eager for a caress as ripe fruit to be plucked, almost as indifferent to whatever hand reached for her as the fruit ready to fall at a touch—even she had nevertheless detected that the man now within the shanty was a gentleman. This was the more strange because he had acted wildly, had frightened her husband, and had almost alarmed her.

That McGuire might understand, she abruptly, as if herself suddenly angered, now imitated the anger of the man who at last was quiet within the hut:

"He say, 'I find 'em! They no hide! They go China—I come! Something here—here—my heart, bring me to 'em! One year, two year, ten, twenty, hundred year, all same—I find 'em byanby! I no die! I can no die! I live, live, live till I find 'em! I feel it here—here my heart, I find 'em some day!'

"Ho!" said Nata in excitement, with sympathy, "he has hate! Stand so straight, like this! An' tall! Sick man, but ho, like this! Straight! He has hate! I like the man to have big hate. Yes! Don't I, Neek? That why I love you, old fool-head, eh?"

"That's 'ow, 'e talks, right enough," said Nick, nodding solemnly. Then, taking a deep breath as if to use the air to blow the words through his wheezy windpipe: "'E tore open 'is shirt—all cut up, 'e's been. An' shot. Poked a spot, like this—" Nick pointed a finger at himself— "Says, 'I can't be kilt!' 'Ow 'e talks! Crazy, but y' b'lieve 'im! Says 'e 's bein' drawed right to 'em. Calls 'isself a Jew, though you wouldn't take 'im f'r no Jew. 'I'm a wanderin' Jew,' 'e says, 'an' can't die till I find 'em!' It's 'orrible, it is. I wanter be rid of 'im!"

"Let's have a look," said McGuire.

The man lay face down on his folded arms at a table. His features were concealed. His hair was unkempt and partly gray.

Presently, more as if he felt their presence than had heard them enter, he moved his head and with chin still resting on an arm looked up. His face was bristly, long unshaven. The features were sharply gaunt, cheeks and eyes sunken, his neck thin. The man's expression was that of a famine sufferer. His eyes, glazed with fever, were fierce in a kind of unfocused way; but though unfocused, they stared at McGuire with suspicion. The lips were dry and had broken into fever scales.

"No, no," he said, seeming to speak to Nata. "This is not the man. You haven't brought the right man. One look—" there seemed actually a flare of light in his eyes— "and he would fall dead before me! One look! I am a basilisk!"

"Been sayin' as 'ow 'e was a Jew," Nick muttered. "Now calls 'isself some other kind of forn'er!"

"You're a —— sick man," McGuire told him, speaking kindly, for though the man was a wreck there were the shadowy remains of a gentleman in his bearing.

He spoke calmly with a kind of weary faith—

"I can't die."

"It's not so hard. Every man does it, sometime in his life. Where you from?"

"I tell no man. They'd hear and know it was—" he tapped his breast— "know it was I!" Then he arose; he was weak but stood straight, erect. His words were wild, but though he was half or wholly out of his head one knew him for a gentleman. "I'll find them! They draw me. I can feel the pull. I said to God, 'See here, you know where they are, and have no right to hide them. It is for you to show me. I put it in your hands!' I said that to Him, God Almighty! In Honolulu—yes, Honolulu. Then I went to the beach. To a captain I'd never seen before, I said, 'Here, here, sir, is money. Take me somewhere. I don't care where!' I knew that wherever I went I would draw nearer to them. Yesterday the captain said, 'This is Kialo. Go ashore or pay more money.' Here I am, here. A drink, please. But I, I can't die!"

Nata brought whisky, McGuire saying, "Can't die, eh?" put out his hand and took away the cup.

"You soon will, drinking this stuff. Get coconuts, Nata."

McGuire then drank the liquor himself and tossed the cup toward the boards that served as a bar. It clanked on the wood and skittered off.

"Horrible stuff," said McGuire with feeling, writhing his lips and shuddering. Nata, prompt to do as told, had gone. McGuire said—

"Nick, you go to town an' bring back the doctor. This man's about done for."

The man, tottering, had sat down as if

falling; he tried to sit up but his head was dizzy, his body weak, he wavered drunkenly.

"Get the doctor!" McGuire repeated.

"'Im? Come 'ere? Not much 'e won't!"

"Oh yes he will. Tell him—"

"I ain't goin'," said Nick, stubborn.

"No?" McGuire eyed the wheezy Nick and slowly smiled, not pleasantly. "Oh, yes, you will. I'll tell you something—" McGuire then bent forward, scrutinizing the sick man's face, and turning again toward Nick said in a tone of confidential alarm, "This man's got the beginning of a red pimply rash. Come an' see for yourself! That's smallpox!"

"Smallpox!" Nick shouted, and with waddling haste stumbled backward. "Get 'way from 'im!"

"Come an' take a look. Come up close an' look!"

"Not me!" Nick answered firmly, edging off. "I don't—"

"Go tell the doctor. You'd better hurry. If you get the doctor right off, maybe he won't burn your shack. If the man breaks out, they'll have to burn—"

"Smallpox!" Nick bellowed as if the full realization had just come upon him. "Get 'way from 'im! You'll get it!"

With that, Nick put himself outside the doorway.

"Oh I'm all right. I've had it. But you'd better get that doctor here. I'll tell in town you wouldn't go, not even after I'd reported smallpox! You'll be run off the island, Nick."

Nick stood outside, peering within. He swore and grumbled. It was a long hot up-grade walk to town, and Nick was fat and sluggish. It would of course, he said, be just his luck for this fellow to have smallpox, which would ruin trade. The blighter couldn't have stumbled into the Chink's hut instead.

"No, 'e 'ad to come to mine!"

An so, unwilling but anxious, Nick set off for town.

Nata came with coconuts, carrying them in her dress which she had gathered up into a bag-like fold. She opened one, poured the juice into a cup and brought it.

"Here," said McGuire, "try this."

But the man had again fallen forward, face down on the table, and did not stir. McGuire lifted his head. The eyes were open but the man seemed dead.

V

DR. MARTIN came on horseback. He was angular, slope-shouldered, careless of dress, careless of what he said —if not indeed careful to be cynical and rude—and his being a little cross-eyed helped him to make people uncomfortable by watching closely in a way that did not seem natural. He had told more than one planter's wife that "a pill's no cure for gluttony." It was known, too, that he was an ex-medical officer, cashiered out of the British navy.

He dismounted at the door, sniffed, snorted, spat, said:

"Bah! Enough to kill a horse, the stink here."

Then for some moments he fingered his scraggly red beard, looked about on all sides and ignored the patient who was now lying on mats that had been brought.

At last he spoke to McGuire, saying indifferently:

"Smallpox, Nick said. Hope so. I've wished for the plague. I want to see who's the biggest cowards on Kialo."

"No smallpox here, doctor. I had to scare Nick into going for you."

"I guessed as much," said the doctor with a kind of unangered snarl. "Knowing you—and Nick. Hump!" He clapped the pillbag on a table. "Plain drunk, eh? Bring me down for that!"

"This man's not drunk. He's sick."

The doctor was not interested, appeared not to have heard; but with an air of infinite leisure thrust his hands into his trousers pockets and walked across the room. He stopped face to face with Nata and stared, looking at her, up and down. She was uneasy under his crossed eyes. He had a way of twitching down one corner of his mouth in a kind of sardonic grimace.

"She's been taking care of this man, like a real nurse," said McGuire quickly, willing to put in a word to spare Nata the insult that he knew was coming. The insult came anyhow.

"*T-huhn!* So this is Nata, heh? What'd I tell you, five or six years ago, when you were only that high and slim as a bamboo? Your big brother carried you up for me to dig a piece of coral out of your heel. Remember? You're lying. You yelled and kicked. I told you then some day you'd let a white man cut your heart out and you wouldn't make a sound. Then you were a clean little savage. Now you're nothing but a—" What he called her was truth, but a brutal thing to say.

Nata, with jaws set, eyed him sullenly, but her eyes glistened with tears. She was, after all, only a child, childishly kind, childishly willful and sensitive.

Dr. Martin, with hands still in his pockets as if he meant to keep them there and have nothing to do with this patient, came to where the sick man lay and looked down indifferently. Then, as if his professional interest was attracted, he bent forward, more closely examining the emaciated body, the famished face.

Straightening, the doctor looked at McGuire and asked:

"Got a shovel?"

"No. He's that far gone?"

"I'll say it's smallpox, then we burn this shack. And put you in quarantine. You like a joke. I'll play that one. You had yours in getting me down here."

Then the doctor knelt, hands yet in his pockets. He showed no interest but observed the sick man with a kind of detachment, merely an idle gaze, and it was still with an air of indifference, as if the gesture were one of habit, that he reached out and put thumb and finger to the sick man's wrist. Presently he dropped the wrist, still uninterested.

"The same as dead, McGuire. Nata, hand me that bag."

Nata, quietly but with an air of anger, brought the bag and held it out at arm's length, standing as far off as possible. But the doctor did not appear even to notice. He took the bag, opened it, took out a small bottle, shook a few pills into the palm of his hand, then throwing back his head tossed the pills into his own mouth, and as he chewed on them, returned the bottle and clicked the bag shut.

"I was in a poker game last night. Always makes me bilious to lose at poker. My pills won't help this fellow. When I was a young fellow—" Dr. Martin took out a cigaret, lighted it, puffed—"When I was a young fellow, I was the most surprized chap you ever saw if a patient didn't get well. Now if I cure anybody I feel lucky. With a man like this—" he tossed away the cigaret—"not a thing in the world you can do unless you believe in prayer. White men don't. That's why they rule the earth. In a storm at sea—I've seen it happen a dozen times—Chinamen fall to the deck and pray. White sailors curse a blue streak and go aloft. Who is this fellow, McGuire?"

"Never saw him before. Calls himself the Wandering Jew. He's looking for somebody. Says he can't die."

"Um? Does eh? Doctors fool a lot of 'em that have that idea."

Dr. Martin took hold of the end of his scraggly beard and twisted it about, up and down, as one twists a piece of wire to break it. Then, half idly, he opened the man's shirt and laid the body bare from throat to waist. The breast was scarred and gashed.

"By ——, McGuire, this fellow's got some reason for his boast! Here's a record for you! Written on his flesh. Romance, adventure! Bullet here—two? Yes, two. This scar looks another! And cut up, too! He's taken 'em all face-on, and that's the man's way! Let's try what we can do. I believe he's worth it. Nata, get some rags. Tear up your best dress if you've washed it lately. Bring water and a bottle of whisky. We'll give him the nearest thing we can to an alcohol bath. His body's good as

dead, but he's got that something in him that don't give much of a —— about his body, or he'd never have pulled through from the way he's been chopped up at times—"

Late that afternoon the man, not being yet dead though hardly alive, was carried on a stretcher of poles and plaited palm leaves into the hut of a native family where he would be as well cared for as anywhere he could be taken. Somebody would sit by, fanning flies from his face, and giving him drinks of cool coconut milk, although out of eager generosity that same somebody in spite of warnings and explanations was, if the man asked for such things, likely to feed him canned salmon and raw gin.

VI

McGUIRE spent the night on the beach, drinking some, listening to half drunken men sing and tell stories. When he was weary he slept on the warm sand and awakened contented. The dissipation had been mild, the pleasure an idler's. He loafed about the town in the morning, mostly at the general store owned by the Benz brothers, young Germans who were getting on in the world and deserved to, if attentiveness to business were a virtue. They had recently built a small ice-house on the speculative guarantee of some man who had promised to ship in ice, which next to gold, was about the most desired thing in the tropics. The ice was not forthcoming; the Benzes goodnaturedly took a ragging from the planters who offered all manner of absurd suggestions as to what use the ice-house might be put to.

Having visited the sick man who was yet alive—just that and nothing more—McGuire, about the middle of the afternoon, set out for Brade's. He had gone some miles and was riding along sleepily when he chanced to look up and saw that just ahead of him Reena and old Tomas were sitting motionless on horses which they had reined off to one side of the road. Both were watching him.

McGuire, being doubtful of this Tomas, a fellow with a forbidding Indian look, well known on the island as Miss Reena's escort if not jailer, touched his hat as he came before them and kicked the pony's sides, meaning to ride on. He did not want Tomas reporting that he had talked or tried to talk with Miss Reena.

But she, seeing he was going by, called softly—

"Oh Mr. McGuire, please!"

He checked the pony, twisted about and looked at her inquiringly, but glanced with suspicion at Tomas.

Reena was bareheaded; her hat had been pushed from her head and hung at the back, the ribbands about her throat. Her dark hair was massed in coils. She carried her head up always. This increased the look of pride with which she, a little sullenly, seemed to regard the world. She looked down upon McGuire. Her eyes did not waver but she hesitated; then a smile, shy and nervous, lighted her face as if sunlight had glanced across it. She said—

"We have been waiting for you."

The smile passed. Her look became doubtful, a little anxious and intent.

"If I'd known, I'd have run the legs off this steed."

At that she smiled again, quickly, more to indicate that she wished to be friendly than from any amusement. She looked toward the pony, old and fat, almost as incapable of running as of flying. She hardly saw the pony. It was merely something to look at while she overcame a fluttering uncertainty in her throat. Her resolution was made and she would talk with McGuire, but it was not easy. She had known that it would not be easy.

McGuire, for his part, eyed old Tomas, a small dark wrinkled Spaniard or Indian, who now held a cigaret between his fingers, and the fingers but a few inches before his face. His lips were pursed as if thoughtfully tasting the smoke which he watched.

"It was Tomas who said I ought to talk to you," Reena spoke quickly, sensing

McGuire's distrust of the man. "And," she added a little hesitantly, "I have wanted to—so much."

"For you—whatever I can do, I'll be glad to try it. But how does it happen he thinks I'm all right?"

"Mr. Zurdas struck Tomas, struck him with his fists, and swore at him—oh frightfully—for not winning the race. Mr. Zurdas said he had not tried to win. Poor Tomas!"

She turned with an expression of pity and looked toward the old fellow. She had heard him abused. She had gone to him afterward in secret, offering that consolation of touch and kind word that is the balm of a tender woman and not within the gift of any other person.

Besides, it was her horse Tomas had ridden and, the race lost, her forgiveness seemed a full pardon.

"We have talked, Tomas and I—for I must, I must—he says that I must trust some one. And he said—said he would trust you and —"

She had spoken simply, but stopped as if even now a little afraid to trust any one. This seemed distrust more than embarrassment, because her gaze did not waver. But as McGuire waited, looking toward her expectantly, she did lower her eyes and run a hand caressingly along the horse's neck.

"Trust you and one other person," she added, looking up.

"Who, Miss Symonds?"

"You and David Brade."

"I see," said McGuire soberly, his thought ever alert, perhaps too alert, to guess at what lay behind people's words. David was handsome, this girl young and beautiful. "Yes, David is a good boy." McGuire nodded.

Reena, with earnestness and bending forward slightly, said:

"But it is *you* I have felt I just had to talk to. I want to ask, Mr. McGuire do you—you don't, do you?—know about—about *me*? The way you talked before Mrs. Morris made me think—but how could you? And now I know that Mr. Symonds is afraid of you, afraid you do. But you don't, you really don't? How could you?"

"Mr. Symonds afraid? Of me? In what way?"

"He said to me, of you, 'I do not like McGuire.' He told me—" this simply, as directly as a little child might have said it— "that you were a very bad man. And some days ago I heard him say to Mr. Zurdas, 'I heard McGuire today talking of Honduras. The more I think of what he said, and the way he said it, the more I feel that he may have been hinting at something.' Mr. Zurdas swore and asked what you had said. And Mr. Symonds said, 'Let us take a walk and I will tell you. Then they went out of the room. I have wanted so to know, to ask you—do you know? You can't though. How can you?"

McGuire scratched at the side of his long nose and thoughtfully delayed his reply. He was distrustful of old Tomas. Perhaps Tomas had been outraged by Zurdas' knocking him about, and was now angered, but anger passes. In a day or two, a week or month, Tomas might face about and serve Zurdas as best he could.

At last McGuire admitted—

"I know enough I've wondered you haven't told the consul."

"You do know that Mr. Symonds is not my father!"

McGuire eyed Tomas, then nodded.

"But how, how could you?" Reena asked, astonished.

"How much does he know, Tomas there?"

"All that I could tell him, and that only yesterday! And as much as I wanted to talk to you, I would not—I just couldn't have tried, except that he told me I ought to."

"Very well then," McGuire said. "I could guess at just about everything, but prove nothing. I've wondered why you haven't told the consul. Why haven't you?"

"But how, how can you know? I am so glad you do, but—but how?"

"Some other time perhaps, I'll tell you.

There's risk in telling too much—" McGuire glanced again at Tomas— "I've found people who know too much are sometimes hanged, and it's called suicide."

Reena did not understand, but with puzzled earnest eyes tried hard to search out the significance of what he said. She sensed a meaning hidden in the words, saw its shadow in the expression on his face, but guess what he meant she could not. She had never in the least imagined why the Preston woman had fled the house and taken to the jungle.

Reluctantly, feeling that she really ought to understand since he seemed to think she would, Reena said—

"I don't at all know what you mean."

"Which is just as well," said McGuire. "You're the happier for it."

"Happy? I! Ever? How can you use the word when you know!"

"I'll ask again, why haven't you told Consul Morris?"

"Oh, surely you know that? They have told every one that at times I am out of my mind. That my mother, my poor mother! had gone mad too. Oh that's true, I'm sure. Almost every time I am near Mrs. Morris she hints at going mad. It began when I was a little child because Manuel would torture lizards and laugh. I struck him for it. He would cripple little things and throw them at me to make me scream. But I would not!

"They have always told the women they brought here to be my tutors that I was strange, not truthful, must be watched, that I was out of my mind at times. How I have hated them, all of them! Whatever I said, they would go at once and repeat to Mr. Symonds. That made me want to lie and imagine wild things. I would make up stories and make them believe me, too. They would hurry to tell Mr. Symonds.

"It has been like that from the time I could remember—and I do remember, though I have overheard Mr. Symonds and Mr. Zurdas say I could not possibly know anything of what happened before we came here. But I do know that I half remember my mother. In the dark— We must have been on a ship—"

Reena's eyes, as she now spoke, took on the absent staring of one who thoughtfully looks at nothing, seeming to see with the inner mind's eye the trailing wisps of memory, bodiless of outline, too much like phantoms to be caught or even clearly seen.

"—we must have been on a ship, because always when I think of my mother we seem to be rocking and swaying, and she seems to be crying in the darkness. I know my mother's voice told me then that my father was dead."

She paused, staring absently, seeming to try to remember more, but the phantoms of childish memory had fled, leaving only a blank darkness. She shook her head, brushed her hand before her eyes and looked at McGuire.

The expression that had always seemed pride on her face had given way to a kind of wistful sadness. Her voice was low and very sweet:

"I can't explain, but something—there must have been something, some reason that I felt always, for I never liked Mr. Symonds and was always afraid of Mr. Zurdas, and oh, always I was so lonely! One night I heard Mr. Zurdas laugh. I can't remember how old I was, but a child, and I wondered why he talked loud and laughed. I got out of bed and crept near like a little lizard and watched him. I know now he had been drinking. After that, often when I was put to bed I would creep out. Sometimes I would fall asleep, and when I was found there the next morning it was said that I walked in my sleep. I was 'queer' in every way they said.

"One night I heard them talk about me, my mother and my father. Mr. Zurdas had been drinking again. Oh I was frightened, and how I hated them, both of them. But something, though I was only a child—my fear, I think—made me say to myself, 'I must not let them know I know!' I never tried to listen to their talk again. And now they say I must marry Manuel, soon. And what can I

do? Today I heard one of our men say he had overtaken and passed you leaving Port Kingston, that you were riding this little pony. So I hurried to get old Tomas. Yesterday we had a long talk, poor Tomas and I, about what I ought to do. And he said I should trust you. So we came here and waited. What can I do?"

"What would you like to do?"

"Oh go away! I do not care where, but get away, get far away!"

"You are right, Miss Symonds in thinking—"

"You must not call me Miss Symonds. The name is not mine, and I hate it. I am Reena. I do not know my father's name but I do know, because I heard Mr. Zurdas say so, that he was an American."

"You are right, Miss Reena, in thinking people would not believe your story because—"

At that moment Tomas struck his horse and came into the road. He spoke hurriedly to Reena, saying—

"Some one comes!"

Listening, they could hear the creak of a wagon. It would not do to have any one say that Reena, Tomas and McGuire had been seen talking together at the roadside.

Reena leaned from the saddle as she rode by McGuire and said—

"I will watch for you often on the road."

She, with Tomas a little behind, rode at a canter in one direction, and McGuire, at a plodding walk, in the other.

VII

NIGHT came on long before McGuire reached home; but the full moon rose, the night was clear and stars danced.

"That's the way," he said to himself, peering up through an opening in the foliage. "Plenty of light in Heaven, where they don't need it. Earth here, full of heavy shadows squatting motionless across my road."

Musingly, half entertaining himself rather than seriously debating, his thoughts continued:

"An' I wonder will I be friend enough not to tell David this girl has looked upon him from afar? Upset his head. Upset any man's head—has made even mine a little dizzy. 'Go away,' she said. Far away. That means go with some one. It always does. Women never travel alone. And they pick the handsomest man to go with. Which is partly why she can't stay and marry Manuel.

"Manuel, we've got advantage over such as Brade and Fanning. No handsome man can live up to what the woman thinks. An' David, what will you do if you do what a good man who's been beckoned to, should? Eh? You'll have to get off the island with her, for there'd be war in the land. Zurdas would burn out your father right away, shoot somebody an' get her back. I wonder has she looked at you longingly for a long time, or just picked you because you gave old Zurdas such a trouncing? Time's a babbler that tells all secrets; we'll learn by waiting.

"But David's queer. Not even native girls, which is about the same as picking mangoes—that easy, or would be for him. He being a big handsome boy, they gaze at him admiringly; and he doesn't see 'em! Not so with Fanning. Has one o' the best women on the island an' still goes sneaking off to that Tiulia. She's no fool, Tiulia! Old Grimes has put 'er up to something that will make Fanning hop the hurdles—"

McGuire laughed. Grimes had made him at least a passive conspirator in the crafty Tiulia's little joke on Fanning. Fanning was cautious and thrifty, but Grimes was malicious, Tiulia clever; the game was only mildly extortionate, but sufficiently so to make Fanning unhappy, and it was a joke to make all Kialo howl with laughter, when the time came. It was this howling to which Grimes maliciously looked forward, and McGuire too, though he was a little hurt by the pity of how Mrs. Fanning would feel.

"And when she's learned her man is no —— good, what good'll be the learning? Only pain. What good is pain? To make

you feel a fool. Fools never learn—which is why they're fools. Aye, but the happier for it! There's Manuel, blasted half-wit, who never suspects he's not so good as the best and so, more than better men, is pleased with himself. Then my prayer should be, 'Dear Lord, make me a bigger fool than I am!' Methinks I hear the Lord's voice say, 'All right, McGuire. That's easy done!' Aye, by a woman's smile and her wild story. Meddle? Not I! I'll stand wide aside an' let David have the happiness of being the fool to care a —— what happens to 'er."

VIII

WHEN McGuire reached the paddock he got off and fumbled about in the dark grain shed for a measure of that meal which was supposed to be served only to work horses; he then led the pony through the gate, removed the bridle and poured the meal into a feed box, saying:

"You lick that clean, young fellow. If Fanning sees what's left we'll both get scolded."

The wise old pony, most of his life having been spent in the gentle service of Mrs. Brade, valued caresses more than food and, ignoring his supper, followed McGuire to the gate, putting down his head to be scratched and petted.

McGuire scratched between the ears, saying:

"You're a simpleton, you are. Big dunce, Johnny, to run your legs off carrying a fellow that can't ride—then expect to be thanked for it. No reason to scratch your head when I'm through with you. Don't you know that? Next time I want a ride you cut some capers, then you'll see how coaxing I can be and full of 'fection!"

He gently pushed the pony's nose from the gate and closed it.

McGuire set out toward the house where he lived. This was a native hut, more like a shed than a house.

He had not gone far when he happened to glance backward and saw, through the wide stable doors, lanterns and people. He turned back and cut across to the stable to learn why people were up this time of night.

Grimes held one lantern. Another was hooked overhead on a harness peg.

Old Brade was there, his arms loosely at his side. The stoop of his thick body gave him the appearance of bending forward as he looked to where Mrs. Fanning, careless of the dirt, knelt on the ground at the head of a horse lying there.

Two or three other men stood about, awkwardly bareheaded, bearded, clothes stained with dirt and dried sweat, and Fanning, full of complaint, stamped and swore.

The sick mare heaved as if sobbing. The body was swollen, the legs were stiffly out-thrust. Near-by was a whisky bottle with still a little of the dirty-colored liquid in it. The rest had been poured down the mare's throat. The remedy had been pure guess-work, and not lucky. No one knew what was wrong. Mrs. Fanning held the head, caressed the velvet cheek and neck, murmured lovingly as to a sick child.

McGuire came in as quietly as into a sick room. One or two of the men looked at him, sighed audibly and shook their heads, admitting helplessness. This was no loss of theirs except in sentiment. They were mere hirelings, and on pay-days gambled and drank away what their sweat brought them.

McGuire edged near old Brade but said nothing. Brade, glancing aside at him, spoke quietly in a slow deep voice—

"We think she's been poisoned, Dan."

At the mention of his name, Mrs. Fanning glanced toward McGuire, but without recognition. And he, with pain deep inside of him, gazed at her. Neither young nor beautiful, not even tidy, though with a kind of energetic helplessness she tried to be, there was still about her a kind of charm, or more than charm. Something admirable, yet something, too, in the past few months, that seemed like uneasiness, as if she were afraid—afraid she would show fear.

McGuire, and the others also, now felt

sorry for Fanning. It was a heavy loss, this horse. Had he been silent they would have felt more sorry, but there was a whine in his curses and too much cursing. Those overseers were rough wandering men, their flesh harder than Fanning's bones, if it came to a fight. Woman or no woman present, if stung they would have put a clatter of oaths into their words with sudden energy and anger. But to stand and swear whiningly—that was an unmanly weakness and, though coarse in such matters, they thought Fanning should have shown more respect for his wife.

"Whoever heard of such rotten luck! This morning a thousand dollars couldn't have touched her! Now her ——hide is not worth the skinning!"

Mrs. Fanning looked up toward him quickly, the glow of outrage in her eyes. She had loved the mare. Talk of skinning a dead child would hardly have seemed harsher.

"Jack done it!" Fanning said, staring at one man, then another, hoping for a confirming nod. Jack was the jockey who, having won the race, contemptuously refused to return to Brade's. With Fanning's spurs still on his feet he had hired out to another planter. "He said he'd get even with me! He done it! Wait till I catch him, I'll—" He told of what he would do. No one believed him. They would have thought the less of him had they believed him.

"Maybe she's et something an' bloated," a fellow suggested timidly.

"Bloated!" Fanning swore. "Of course she is! But who done it? I never have any luck!"

As little as Fanning was in appearance like Nick the shanty keeper, their talk was much alike, and McGuire wondered if a fat wheezy Fanning would not some day, with a black wife, be swindling seamen with bad booze on the beach.

"All the trouble I've taken with this —— horse! I never have luck! Now some men—"

Grimes spat and eyed him, meaning to say something about running a horse and not backing her, but closed his mouth again out of respect for Mrs. Fanning.

"What d'you think, McGuire?" Fanning pointed angrily toward the mare as he looked at McGuire. "You knew that little —— well. He done it, didn't he?"

McGuire shook his head, meaning not to answer; then without his forethought out popped the words:

"If it was you poisoned, I might think the kid did it—but not a horse. Not the horse he'd won a race on!"

"Exactly!" said Mrs. Fanning, lifting her eyes in a quick angry glance.

Men grinned; those nearest half furtively nudged McGuire approvingly.

"Right," said a voice. "Jack never done it. He was an ugly little ——, but loved horses. An' had a way with 'em, he did."

"If it wasn't Jack it was old Zurdas!" Fanning shouted, making the most of a sudden thought, and looked about, hoping for agreement.

"Well, you might get young Dave to lick 'im for you," Grimes suggested, it being known to all that Zurdas easily had thrashed Fanning.

As best he could, Fanning ignored the remark, but grew red of face and at last became silent. He bitterly sensed the men's lack of sympathy. Afterward he said they were glad that his horse died.

After that they all stood about with but little more said. No one knew what to do and apparently the men did not feel it would be just right to go away and leave the Fannings, though the hour was growing late and the morning's work would begin early. They could not leave Mrs. Fanning crouching there helplessly, though their remaining did not make her less helpless.

The horse died with all limbs quivering rigidly and neck out-thrust.

Mrs. Fanning, not looking at any one, got up. Her legs were stiff from the long discomfort of kneeling. From the way she kept her face downcast it was plain that she was trying not to let any one see that there were tears in her eyes. She

brushed at her skirt, knocking off straw and dirt.

Old Brade, without a word, turned and went out. They were used to having him come and go in that manner. The other men, speaking among themselves, wishing they could say something with a show of sympathy for Mrs. Fanning, said merely:

"A —— shame." "Sure is, boys." "We'd better be movin'. Can't do nothin' here, much as we'd like." "Bring 'long our lantern, Grimes."

They started off.

Fanning checked them with—

"First thing in the morning one of you hitch a team to this —— carcass and drag it off down there below the drying shed and have the blacks bury it."

A man bobbed his head but no one answered otherwise. They went out, scraping heavy boots stumblingly. McGuire followed.

The moon was high and bright. Grimes, who carried the lantern, paused to blow out its light, then as he held the extinguished lantern almost against his face, he turned quickly, listening.

"That's her cryin' now!" he said in a lowered voice to McGuire.

"Yes."

"It's hit 'er hard. It would. She loved that horse."

"Horse be ——," said McGuire. "She's not crying over that."

"What then?"

"Aye, what? You know, or should. Grimes, the only way to keep a woman's love is to lie to her. Lie he must, for no man's half the man a woman thinks he is. An' there tonight Fanning told the truth about himself."

CHAPTER IV

THERE came into Port Kingston a pearler full of news, who said he had it fresh from an English planter who had it from young Brade himself. The tale was this: David Brade had killed a Frenchman on Tanna and carried off his wife.

It made talk, that story, being the sort that would make talk. Somebody, wanting to see the old man wince, asked old Brade what he thought of his son now. Nothing came of it for the old man eyed the fellow for a time, then turned away without replying.

Mrs. Brade anxiously questioned McGuire.

"Mother," he said, "it may be so but there's no truth in it."

"What do you mean, Dan? How can that be?"

"I'd say, to make a guess, blacks potted the Frenchman, and David put the woman on board. If there's that much truth to the story, it'll be truer than most island tales."

"I hope so. I hope it's nothing worse."

"David wouldn't steal anything—much less something he didn't want."

"But a woman, Dan. They're wicked, some are. There's no tellin' what a man'll do!"

"Oh yes there is. He does what he shouldn't, if the woman's young. But no young woman would be a planter's wife on Tanna."

"But sin's like tar, Dan. It sticks to you if you get close. Just touch it once—it's hard to clean."

"All right, mother. If he comes home spotted, we'll scrub 'im. Have soap, brush and a wash-tub ready."

Not long after this a French gunboat came to Port Kingston. The captain talked with the French consul, Lamont, and Lamont told that the gunboat would await the coming of David Brade's schooner, and why.

The gunboat waited patiently. The crew frolicked ashore and the officers were entertained by their planter countrymen.

II

THE Brade land touched the sea, and near-by was a small native village on a shallow bay, right enough for native craft, though nothing else ventured in.

One night, through the darkness, there came up between the bay and Brade's

home a messenger from the village who shook McGuire out of his hammock and put into his hand a note. The note was from David, whose schooner stood outside the shallow bay, not daring to go into Port Kingston. He had written that McGuire was to come at once, for he was deep in trouble.

McGuire went uneasily. He himself had been into so much trouble here and there that, familiar with the ease by which a man knocking about the islands can get his neck into a rope, he felt anxious over David.

A boat was on the beach to take him beyond the bay where the schooner waited.

The schooner lay aback, and the approaching boat, rowed by four of the blacks, was hailed from afar by David's strong voice, calling—

"Ho, Dan?"

The boat bobbed on a swell under the schooner's side, and McGuire, perched for a jump, looked to where a lantern dangled over the side in a man's hand, to show the sea ladder.

McGuire jumped, and scrambling up was laid hold of by David's hand which held him at the rail's top for a moment as David, bending close, said quickly, with little more than a whisper, as if afraid his voice might be heard on the island—

"Dan, I killed that French planter on Tanna—and both are after me, French and British both!"

Perched there with only one leg inboard—with David, who had not waited for him to get both feet on deck before telling the story, holding him a-straddle on the rail—McGuire chortled deep in his throat and said:

"Bad if true, boy. Killing a Frenchman's like robbing a church. Some pleasure in doing it, but nothing to make a man proud of himself for having been the fool to do it. You, now, why?"

"He was beating a woman, Dan, and—"

"Let go me!" said McGuire, striking at Brade's arm; then turning his head he shouted down toward the water:

" 'Hoy below there! I'm goin' back ashore. Stand by for my jump!"

David caught him with both hands and pulled him inboard, for McGuire struggled as if he wanted to be loose, saying:

"Let go me! You interfered with a Frenchman's family duty. Man that stupid can't be helped. Wouldn't know good advice. I'm going ashore!"

"No," said David who was anxious and thought McGuire overdid what he seemed to think was a joke. "Let me explain! I didn't mean to—"

"Didn't mean to do it, eh?" McGuire jeered. "It's always murder when you do up a man with a woman lookin' on. And it would be just like you to have her on board too!"

"I have," said David. "And can't be rid of her. I want you—"

"Want me to take her ashore!"

"I do, Dan. That's it, because—"

"No, not to save your neck! Let go o' me! I didn't kill a Frenchman, but you keep me on board and I'll be hung too!"

David half sensed a jest in the jeering, but as this was no time for jesting he held McGuire more tightly, saying:

"Listen, this is serious. I can't be rid of her—"

"With all the ocean to drown her in? French is she?"

"And can't speak English! Not a word! I don't know a word of French except cuss words, so—"

"They're enough if she's a planter's wife, both to make love with and express your truer feelings!"

"Stop making a joke of me," said David. "And now you listen!"

That being of course what McGuire wanted, he let himself be led to the skylight, and, sitting down, listened while David stood before him and, with embarrassment but honesty, told the story. All the while McGuire grinned unsympathetically.

III

McGUIRE, in re-telling the story, would begin by explaining that Tanna was earth's nearest place to hell.

"You smell the sulphur. It's where

the devil has his breathing hole. Volcano, people call it who miscall everything in this our part of the world.

"For no more of a reason than a bad-hearted Frenchman needs, this fellow was on Tanna. All alone, except for the woman. The thousandth chance wins at times, and he stayed alive. Good men die young, they say, but the devil wants his fruit thoroughly ripe.

"This fellow'd built him a house inside of a stockade. Bought up coconuts from the natives. Sold 'em to any trader that came along. David heard of him and thought to have a try. Poked his schooner into the harbor one afternoon, and the fellow came on board. Said he had full sheds, and would David come up and spend the night?

"Not David. He could smell a drunken night of it, and he's no saint, but isn't much given to making himself that sort of fool. Has other ways of doing it! Besides, he didn't want to be away from his schooner all night, not off Tanna, where the blacks are treacherous bullies.

"As for the woman, David didn't know about her, didn't know she was there. The fellow was a drunken pig. The woman—well, I'd say she'd been kicked about by heavy boots long before she fell in with Louie. Was well used to it.

"Lonely, dangerous place, Tanna. With half a guess at what it was like, no woman would have gone. Being dead in hell not far worse than being alive on Tanna, with Louie. But being there, there was nothing for it but to make the best of what he gave her and try what death-screams would do each time she started in to make him satisfied he'd beat her enough. The fellow had broken her nose and knocked out some teeth. She wasn't young and, having made her hideous, he abused her without, you know, ever having moods when he didn't. She wasn't his wife—was just a woman and used to the way of a drunken brute.

"Well, Dave Brade wasn't; and the next morning, coming up to the house to see about coconuts, he heard her yells. Thought—there was nothing else to think!—the natives had broken in and were finishing off the Frenchman and servants. Habit natives have over Tanna way. Elsewhere too at times.

"So, David heard her. Yelp, yelp, yelp, like death or fear of it. And hearing that, David bolted right on through the stockade gate.

"Dog was chained there—bit and barked when natives tried to sneak through or climb the fence. Dog must have known what was up, must have understood the sort David was. One look at him an' anybody ought to understand. You see, the woman fed the cur. It was all she had by way of human companionship.

"So, though David was a stranger he was white, and the dog didn't make a sound. One yowl out of it and French Louie—always keyed up to that sort of danger signal—would have left his sport and bounded out on the veranda with a gun.

"You have to say this for Louie—he was a beast, but not timid, an' expected any day that the niggers would get him. They'd tried to poison the cur, being good at poisonin', those fellows. That was why the woman fed 'im. He'd been taught to eat only what she put out. So the grateful brute kept still and let David pass.

"David went in like the leader of a storming party. He doesn't say so, of course, but knowing him you know that is the way he would go in. And alone—remember that! A wise man, knowing Tanna, would have turned and made for his schooner. He expected tomahawks and bullets, natives charging about. He found a man, white man, beating a woman—white woman!

"David can't say just what he did, though at that he's really a cool-headed lad. But this kind of thing sort o' made him dizzy with anger, and when it was over the drunken Frenchman lay huddled and motionless, much like a sackful of broken bones—that's David's wording, sackful of broken bones—in a corner.

"And the woman was worse off than

ever. The man that beat her also kept the blacks from eatin' her. Worse off, she was, that is if you think being beaten every day or two worse than being cooked once. A woman, alone, there! David knew that to leave her was to kill her.

"She spoke no English, he no French, but signs worked—that, and the woman's fear of being left. So he hurried her on board, leaving everything just as it was. Left even the dog, for it lay quiet as they passed out and was forgotten.

" 'If I'd noticed, I'd surely have brought the old fellow,' said David.

"He no sooner got both feet on his own deck than he began to be pretty sick over the affair. This was the first white man he'd ever done in. There's been a brush every once in a while with native, but that doesn't reach a man's feelings like this hand-to-hand work that leaves a white man's ghost over your head. Besides, having the ugly hag on his hands was like the burden of a sin he hadn't enjoyed. More, too; he knew the French, being full of colonial ambitions down in these seas these days, don't like it when one of their pawns are knocked off the board.

"David's head was a tangle of worries without a sensible thought of what to do next. Being honest to his marrow bones, he isn't good at thinking of crooked things, though no fool. He likes the frank straight way. Hardly knows how to go about it to lie. Is easy worried by such tricks as the devil plays on a man, like this Tanna thing.

"So David put over to Trigalon where an Englishman he knew was planting coconuts—the same fellow that soon gave the tale to the pearler. David went ashore and told his story.

"The Englishman laughed at him.

" 'Kill a man and take his woman, all out of pure goodness of heart? Not in this climate!'

"David had to take the joke or kill another man, and he rather liked this fellow, so he said:

" 'It's all true as I say. And I want to be rid of her. I've seen too much of the world to go to a French town or an English port and try to get myself believed. I don't so much mind the hiding away until the thing is forgotten, though that ruins my good start in business, but I do mind having her on my hands. All I want is to hand her over to somebody who'll pass her on to where she can have some care.'

" 'Let's have a look,' said the Englishman. 'It's —— lonely here.'

"So he went on board. He saw the battered sick woman.

" 'Not for me,' said the Englishman. 'She, ten years younger and more teeth—I might be a Samaritan. But I do believe your tale now. Thank God, I've got no such goodness of heart as to mess me up with her! You decent fellows earn the reward that's coming to you in Heaven. Sink your schooner under your feet and go claim it. That's the best way out!'

" 'I don't like jokes,' said David. 'And what am I to do with her?'

" 'What? Why,' said the Englishman, 'whatever you want to do! Dump her on the first beach. Natives won't hurt her, and she can't live long. She may be white, but I have doubts. There's a deeper black than bruises in her. Look out for her, youngster. This sort love the beasts that knock 'em about a bit. And you're right to keep away from towns. Give her half a chance and she'll lie—say you murdered her husband to steal 'er! I know the breed. Get rid of her, however you can.'

" 'But how? Tell me that!'

" 'Easy thing. Since you're too tenderhearted to use a club—I've got rat poison. I'll lend you a bit. What say?' And he laughed.

"No, and don't blame the fellow. That Englishman was there on one of the earth's black spots, betting his life against fever and, surer than fever, the native tomahawk or spear some day when his back was turned—all for a few coconuts. He meant nothing of what he said and would have said worse rather than appear touched. A man wears callous spots on his tongue in this climate.

Otherwise he cries out in pain, and that's a shameful thing in this part of the world.

"The woman was sick. No doubt of that. David hoped she would die, at least says he did. But no such luck for him, or her!

"He went his rounds, you see, and everywhere, though he'd resolved not to say a word, out would slip the story—he, asking advice. At last he was told:

" 'Why don't you try Sorbu? There's a French trader there with a native wife. Decent fellow, so the blacks say. And what they say, unless they are Christainized, is near true!'

"So to Sorbu he went. The young French planter—he looked a decent fellow, too—talked excitedly, waving his arms, gesturing Brade and his woman off the beach. The Frenchwoman was excited, too. The name Louie was shrill in their mouths. They jabbered at David, who frowned hard, trying to understand. He made out that a ship had already touched here, looking for him.

" '*Deux!*' said the planter, which with two fingers up is enough like *two* for an easy guess. '*Un Breetish, un Français—deux! Louie—oui, oui!*'

"Gestures, growing violent, showed that he understood what David wanted, and no! He would not keep the woman.

"So David made the guess—there was nothing else he could have guessed—that French and British both, having somehow quickly learned that he had killed Louie, were already going here and there looking for him.

"There was nothing for it but to go to sea again; so there they went, and didn't know where to go, being at sea like two lost souls adrift.

"Finally he came home, avoided Port Kingston, and hung off the bay, and having told me his story, he frowned hopefully and asked—

" 'Now McGuire, what can I do?'

" 'Do? With half your luck, we'd all land in Heaven! Your precious Louie is not dead. 'Sack o' broken bones,' eh? A drunk man clouted over the head looks like that when pitched into a corner. And the natives didn't go in after you left. The dog stood guard till he got sober. Then a French gunboat picked him up—was after the blighter for a nasty piece of work over in the Pautomus. That's why he was hid away on Tanna. The woman was with him in the Pautomus. That's why they're after her and you! The French gunboat passed word to the British they fell in with. We've known it two weeks here on Kialo, where a Frenchman's waiting for you to show up.

" 'Now you square about and, come morning, go into Port Kingston as if you'd finished your trip as usual. Say you were trying out the hearts of all these fellows you told your story to; say you found their hearts —— black. Say it you must, else you'll be laughed out of the islands. Now I'm going back ashore so none will have a chance to know there in town I've given you the truth about this thing.

" 'And one thing more. Since you do it well, there's another woman wants to be stolen! I've talked with her on the road last day or two. She hasn't said much about you, but I make the guess this French affair had helped her think you'll steal her next. And you will, of course!'

"David thought this, too, a joke, and wasn't curious enough to ask her name. He felt like a man who'd been kicked off the gallows with a loose end of rope about his neck. Would hardly believe the truth, but, believing at last, laughed long and half shame-faced, for the joke was good, though on himself. He swore big oaths against all women. He'd had a scare. Said men could beat 'em as natives beat clothes at the washing for all of him!

"And that hag? We heard in time about it. One look at Louie and she cried with joy. She swore to every lie that would, if true, have saved the brute. But the French knew what was what, and put him 'gainst a wall, then laced his ribs with lead."

IV

DAVID reached home the following afternoon and had hardly greeted his mother before he spoke of being off again. A day or two at most, he said, was all that he could stay.

His cruise had been interrupted. There were planters and traders scattered here and there who depended on his coming for supplies. Hardly less was their lonely eagerness for the brief and vague contact with the outside world than for the goods he brought.

He restlessly named this and that man on this and that far beach who would be expecting him. His mother gazed reproachfully. A strong son was needed at home. Here was more wealth, ready at hand, than all his cruising far and wide would bring him. It was beyond her understanding that he would not long remain on land but must go to sea.

In answering her gentle complaining McGuire had once pointed from the veranda toward a crooked-wing frigate bird that flew across the jungle seaward.

"So with David," said McGuire. "The land is fat with fruits. Pigeons and parrots thrive greedily, Mother. But the hawk goes seaward. Why? No man can say, but so it is, and so with David. He no more than a hawk will come to earth unless crippled—or to build himself a nest! Better a salty hunger than a full craw of land stuff. So such birds think, and some men."

Such an explanation did not give her mother-heart an understanding of why it should be so. She said:

"I do wish David would find some nice girl and want to stay home! And I'd like to see you married too, Dan. And settled right here close by me. You and David, both my boys."

"Heaven help the woman fool enough to marry me, for I'll be the bigger fool to marry such a dunce as that! So you see the bargain she'll get."

"That's just some more of your talk, Dan. You ought to marry. It's right you should. It's wrong not to. So there!"

"If it's right to marry the wrong one, Mother, then most people ought to feel pretty smug. But they don't. They look unhappy, which isn't a proper reward, is it, for people who've tried to do right?"

V

DAVID, at home, usually slept in the hut with McGuire where the native servants threw mats on a bunk for him and hung up the mosquito netting. He slept there, liking McGuire's company, not liking the musty room and damp, mildewed bed reserved for him as for a special guest in his father's house. Such was the affectionate misunderstanding between mother and son that David would rumple the bed deceptively, then withdraw to the airy hut where he could sleep in more comfort.

David, with the careless relaxation of a big strong man somewhat weary, for the previous night had been sleepless and this day full of bustle with much talk among Frenchmen in the morning, now sat upon McGuire's small sea chest, folded his hands behind his head, thrust out his legs, yawned, said—

"I'll sleep well this night."

McGuire gave him a slant-eyed look and rammed crumbled tobacco into his pipe-bowl.

"So?"

"Yes." David laughed a little. "I've had bad dreams for a month. What a mess! I'm still half 'fraid it isn't true."

"No sleep tonight for you," said McGuire.

"How none? I'll show you. You doze all day like a lizard. When night comes you're full of talk. I know your tricks. By the way, Fanning says you say you're not going blackbirding any more. Why so?"

"I'm going away with you."

"I'm glad of that. I wished for you this trip! But what's that to do with not bringing blacks?"

"I'm not coming back."

"Not coming back? Not back to Kialo, Dan?" David straightened, got

up, then laughed and sat down. "You're getting ready a joke. I know the weather signs."

McGuire, with feet outspread and thumbs in belt, spoke with the pipe between his teeth:

"You've had your turn. Now I'll have a try."

"At what?"

"At playing the fool."

"How?"

"I," said McGuire, "am going to carry off a woman. You've shown how. It's easy done."

David laughed, sagged back, and laughing said:

"On my schooner, eh? Not much. I've had all to do with women that I want."

"I mean it," said McGuire, but because his wide mouth twitched with smiles David, after a doubtful pause, laughed again.

"Who is she, Dan?"

"You won't let me carry her off on your schooner?"

"No, I won't. Are you in love?"

"No," said McGuire; but nodding and with meaning look he added, "I'm not. But I think she is."

"Then I can understand your wanting to run, but why take her? Who is she, Dan?"

"She's good to look at. Knows it. That's reason enough for doing what she wants, isn't it?"

"I think you're joking. But if you're not, don't do it, Dan!" David said it earnestly though with an effort not to appear serious.

McGuire, above an oddly twisted smile, eyed him and answered:

"Natives say advice out of a young mouth is unripe fruit. But off that chest. Dry talk is too slow work. Get up."

David arose. Shoulder to shoulder, he was almost a long head taller than McGuire, almost twice as broad, nearly as darkly tanned; his face was rugged and good-natured. McGuire had hardly a feature other than his mild blue eyes to keep him from looking the rascal.

The sea chest was never locked. McGuire threw up the lid and drew out not one bottle but two. Handing them up to David he still pawed about.

"Here, one's more than enough. It's little I want."

"I had a corkscrew, but perhaps the moths broke in an' rusted it away. I've been reading the Bible an' find they do such things."

Not finding the corkscrew, McGuire took one of the bottles from David and holding it out in his left hand, struck at the short neck of the square face with the edge of a rigid palm, snapping the neck off almost squarely.

"I don't see how you do it." said David.

McGuire, spilling a little of the gin to wash away any loose splinters of glass, began to fill a tin cup, said:

"Nor I how you can bash a coconut with your knuckles. Here—" he held out the cup—"to understand what I've got to say you'll need a lot of this. To tell it as I should, I'll need even more!"

Then taking up half of a coconut shell he filled it for himself.

They drank, McGuire deep, draining the shell, David with a shallow swallow or two, for he had no real liking for the sting in his throat nor the wild-fire in his blood.

Sitting again on the chest, and thinking it all a joke, David said:

"Now tell me about her. The woman who loves you."

"Loves me?" said McGuire, refilling his shell. "I know of no such woman. This—" he lifted the bottle—"is my beloved. She never deceives, being always treacherous. Other women fool you—they are sometimes loyal."

"This woman you want to carry off on my schooner. You said she loved you."

"I did not!" He drank. "I said she was in love. At least that is my guess." He drained the shell. "Anyhow, she wants to go. And I go, too. If I stay behind, not being able to bash coconuts or Zurdas' head, I'd have my neck cracked for having helped her."

McGuire refilled his shell.

David, who knew him well, or thought so, thought this some more of McGuire's playfulness, and asked:

"Why should we do it? And who is she?"

"Why? She has beauty and awakens pity. When God made men He made no talisman to ward off that appeal. What she wants done we'll do. She wants to go. Her name is Reena Symonds!"

David said nothing but lightly sipped at the cup's brim. This was too absurd for laughter. He did not even feel teased. McGuire, watching closely, saw with exasperation that his yawn was unaffected, saw that, out of pure sleepiness, David, putting his half-filled cup carefully to one side on the ground, was unlacing his shoes.

"You don't think it true. But what would you say if you did think it true? Tell me that."

David answered sleepily:

"Oh everybody knows her brain's full of kinks. Always has been. An' you're drunk already. Hit you quick tonight."

"You don't believe me?"

"Believe you? No. If I did I wouldn't care. Say, I haven't forgot the way she looked at me that day I had the fight with Zurdas. I don't even think she's pretty. She's queer, stuck-up, frost-bitten, looks like a stick and is goin' to marry Manuel. Besides, I'm through with women. That Tanna thing taught me all I want to know. And you are drunk."

Sarcastically and grinning at him, McGuire, with his half-filled coconut shell in a hand that wavered a bit unsteadily, said:

"Oh what a sound when wise withered age speaks through a young man's mouth! You—Romance beckons to you, an' you, you say, 'Take yourself off, hussy. I won't walk aside with a stray wench.' No! 'I'm sen'ble, I am!' You say that to yourself, 'zif a man can't lie to himself as much as to somebody not so easy fooled. If a dark princess at the side of the road had called to you, you've blushed an' rode on! But me, ho! I fell off my steed, kissed 'er stirruped foot an' cried, 'Oh mos' beaut'ful princess, what dragon's hide shall I bring you?' She said 'Oh mos' handsome red-headed knight, I want Dave Brade's heart!' "

"I've never seen you this drunk, McGuire!"

McGuire laughed at him:

"Nor more truthful! Though I've spoke in parable. It's the only way you can teach children. But the facts are these, now you listen close—"

McGuire then told the truth, all of it, from the time of the coming of the Symonds' rider to ask if the Preston woman had been seen. But McGuire was a little drunk and though he was serious his words were too mixed with quirks and twists for David, always suspicious of some joke or other, really to be impressed.

"So you see, there *is* a dark princess, an' she's a captive, with monsters all about. She wants to be saved. An' here you sit, thinking—of what?"

"Well I think it's because of that French woman you've made up this story."

"Don't you believe a word I've said?"

"Half way, perhaps. But too I believe you're drunk! And I know how you can twist things."

"If I'd stayed sober I wouldn't 've told you. That's truth. Not for your sake, but for Mother's. Yet for Reena's I have! I'm glad you're fool enough to be sensible, but what a fool you are! I wish you'd do it, though."

"Look here—" David, with shoes kicked off, stood up, unbuttoned his shirt, made ready to strip it off—"what fun are you to get out of gettin' me into trouble?"

"Trouble? I've pointed to the open gate of Paradise, an' you shy aside! What's the best in life? The love of a good woman, and Reena's that!"

"But I don't want her, —— it!"

"Six feet! That broad—" McGuire put out his hands, measuring—"twenty-four, and doesn't want her! There's men would cut their throats to draw a sigh from such a girl. An' you—'I don't want 'er!' At your age you ought to want, at least want to help, any girl, white,

brown or even black, that's good to look at and in trouble!"

"She can go to the consul or tell other men about Symonds and Zurdas—if it's true. I doubt it. You're drunk. And I'm going to bed."

He vigorously shook the netting to stir up, so as to catch sight of them, any mosquitoes that might be lurking there.

"He carried off a hag of a French woman, but lets the dark princess remain captive. And if you stood before her you would love her, and throw all else away to have her love. Be worth it too, if you ask me."

"Oh go to the ——!" said David and ducked in under the netting, and as he sat up and tucked the netting well about him, added, "Now douse the light an' toll in, McGuire. I want some sleep."

"So much truth out of me, David. In you so little faith! You say, 'Go to bed, McGuire. You're drunk!' Aye, that's the fate of prophets!"

McGuire, with hands that fumbled slightly, tipped the lantern and blew gustily. The light went out, and deep darkness came upon them. McGuire, fumbling, caught hold of the hammock, put the netting aside, and from much practice, expertly, got in; then with arms folded behind his head lay sleepless.

Presently David's deep breathing grew to a rumbling snore; and McGuire, a little drunkenly, mocked the snore with laughter but could not awaken the sleeper.

In two days, David was ready to go to sea again; and oddly enough during those two days it was he who, with lumbering wit, teased McGuire—really teased him, too.

"Kissed any stirruped feet today, Dan?" 'You beautiful red-headed knight, you!" "Skinner of dragons, eh?" "Drunk on more than gin, you were!" "So you're going to stay on the island and skin dragons for 'er?"

McGuire retorted—

"I told you I spoke in parable because—"

"And a parable's something that isn't true. That's the way you usually speak to me."

"The plain truth, I told it too." McGuire gazed at him reflectively, and spoke slowly, "You stay long enough to have her meet us on the road and stand and talk, then you'll whistle another tune! There's something to the girl in her eyes, in her voice, in her very body, that's not found in other women—none you've ever known. You'll do then all I've said, be glad and thank me. Try it. Just try it. I dare you."

"No," said David.

"Coward," said McGuire. "'Fraid of a girl."

"I don't want to see her."

"You're a heartless devil—" McGuire spoke convincingly, perhaps making an honest guess, perhaps merely trying to touch David's imagination—"a heartless devil. It's *you* she loves!"

"You mean it?"

"Course I mean it."

"I don't believe you. Doesn't make any difference anyhow. I'm going out tonight at tide-turn."

McGuire sighed and swore softly. For a moment it had seemed that David was almost interested, but the interest passed.

"Then will you do this?" McGuire asked. "I told you of that fellow found in Nick's shanty. He's half well, but not likely ever to be more than that. Has grown sourly silent. Seems 'shamed to be reminded of how he talked. The doctor says the fellow's a gentleman. Nata guessed as much. Sea trip will do him good. He can't walk much, but says he'd like to go. How about it?"

"Anything to do with Symonds?" David asked suspiciously.

"Not a thing in the world," McGuire paused. "Not that I know of. Though —I wonder? It could be. He's old enough an' full of hate for somebody. Been looking for 'em. I wonder? I'll ask some questions!"

The man had given his name as Mr. Mann, this probably through overhearing himself spoken of by natives as "the

man." He was, but with dignity, grateful for the attentions of Dr. Martin and McGuire, yet, though still too weak to walk more than a few steps, he was annoyed by being in a native hut. He seemed to feel that being there was the mark of having fallen low.

McGuire came to him, and said:

"Captain Brade'll be glad to have you. Says to come right along. But by the way, Mr. Mann, were you ever in Honduras?"

"No," he replied, but his unwillingness to talk of himself showed even now.

"Cuba? South America?"

"Never in that part of the world at all."

"We noticed you had a lot of scars. That's what stirred the doctor up to do what he could for you."

"I have been a soldier," said Mr. Mann with reluctance. Then, purposefully, "A soldier, and suffered wounds about the head. They—ah, you understand?—they seem to affect me strangely at times, as if I went quite out of my mind. I have learned from that detestable old ruffian called Nick that I was quite out of my mind. Quite."

McGuire nodded sympathetically; but secretly he felt that the ironic powers that rule the fate of men had somewhat overlooked the chance for a fine bit of justice in not having this Mr. Mann come from Honduras, where he had been shot and left for dead by men who then stole his wife and daughter. Here and now he would have found his daughter, beautiful and greatly in need of his coming.

Wandering Jew, a basilisk, searching for those who had wronged him—but not from Honduras.

That afternoon Mr. Mann was taken on board, and shortly before sundown the schooner went to sea.

McGuire again spent the night on the beach with those who drank and sang and told queer yarns; but he did not sleep well on the warm sand, the gin had seemed badly flavored and the stories men told were much more dull than his own thoughts.

CHAPTER V

SOME days later word came to Brade, brought by a neighbor who passed, that old Tomas, being drunk, had pitched from a horse, hit his head on a rock and was this day buried.

The neighbor, having said that and other things that he regarded as more important, mostly about the sugar mill in which he was interested with Brade and Fanning, took a last friendly drink of whisky and rode on.

Old Brade who, having age upon him, rested for a long hour each noon but gave hardly another sign of not being strong as the youngest, saw the neighbor go, then sank back in his chair, folded his hands before him and, sleepless, rested; while Mrs. Brade gave her chair a hitch nearer to McGuire and settled herself to listen.

McGuire, thinking of old Tomas and how luckless his death made Reena, who would now have no one near her to trust, poured himself a large drink of whisky, opened the Bible and read aloud. This he did almost every day after the noon hour, on the veranda.

His hypocrite's heart was tender toward Mrs. Brade, whose only son he had tried to lead, if not indeed mislead, into a love affair that would have meant island trouble. For that McGuire, however, gave himself such absolution as he seemed to need by reflecting that any man, if a young man, who has found a moment's great happiness, brilliant with danger and passion, is more fortunate, whatever afterward may be the disillusionment and pain, than those sluggishly placid men who think themselves blessed by a full stomach and a fat faithful wife.

It had not at all entered into McGuire's forethought that David would shun so lovely a girl as Reena. That he might, left to himself, never have looked toward her hopefully seemed likely enough; but that David would regard her with indifference after knowing her story, and even being halfway convinced of McGuire's truthfulness in saying—though this was merely a guess, not illogical, however—

that she looked with a woman's favor upon him—this seemed beyond McGuire's understanding.

"It was that scare from French Louie's woman," said McGuire, giving himself the best explanation he could. "That, and the fool way, like a joke, that I played news-bringer."

With his mind half on his own thoughts, McGuire nevertheless read aloud from the Bible.

Old Brade, presently arising, interrupted him.

"You ridin' toward town this day, Dan?"

"If you like. I'd thought of going in tomorrow."

"Tomorrow'll do. Let Mr. Morris know the cuttings he asked for can be had now."

Saying that Brade pulled his old felt hat down on all sides and with plodding heaviness tramped down the steps and off through the grounds.

McGuire, reading on, soon became aware that Mrs. Brade dozed. By degrees he lowered his tone until when he stopped she did not awaken. He put the book aside and left quietly.

II

HE SAT down in the shade to think of Tomas's death. A luckless thing to happen! Reena could not ride alone, and who would now be with her? Every few days they had been meeting upon the road and Tomas stood sentinel while they talked. McGuire said to himself—

"I'm not likely ever to see her again, alone."

It gave his restlessness no ease to be sitting, so he got up and strolled along idly, entering the coconut grove.

The grove was dim, always dim. The wide-spread fronds, far overhead, made a network and were always tossing about in the wind as if unceasingly at the work of weaving; the tall dark slim straight trunks were like innumerable colonnades raised to some heathen deity. Little insects shaped like men crawled up the slender trunks, nicked off the ripened fruit letting it fall; and coming down again very like insects, the men gathered up the nuts, which were carted off, husked and split. Then, rain and sun being uncertain, the meat was put into kilns to dry.

Here before he noticed—for he would surely have avoided her—Mrs. Fanning, also walking alone with her thoughts, came upon him.

"You look quite woefully serious," she said, with an effort at not being so serious as she, too, looked.

"This is the hour when women doze and men wish they could. Isn't that wide-awake 'Frisco climate out of your veins yet, that you don't take a siesta?"

"I'm now almost a native, Dan," she said, pushing up her loosely knotted hair and smiling, but not happily.

"Hardly. Not if you find pleasure in strolling about in the heat of the day. That's when natives snooze the loudest."

"Dan—" she spoke soberly— "I want to ask you something. And I want an honest reply. May I have it?"

"Expect me, do you, to admit that I give false ones?"

"Now don't try to tease. What I mean is that you may try to spare my feelings. I am past having feelings of the kind that need to be spared. You men dislike Mr. Fanning, don't you? Something has happened recently, hasn't it? Will you tell me frankly, why?"

"Of course I will. He's getting on an' up in the world. He started without much of anything. Now look at him! We always dislike the men that rise."

"That—" she was not deceived in the least—"should make them admire him."

"Should, but doesn't, human nature being what it is. Mine 'specially!"

"There's something else. I sense it in their looks and the way, too, they look at me. It's so very apparent recently. It's like a secret you men know and keep from me. What is it, please?"

"Why, you ought to ask some one of those fellows who show they know the secret. You haven't seen it in my looks."

"Yes. In yours too, Dan. Tell me, won't you?"

"Well yes, he *is* a pretty stiff boss. My part, I don't like being bossed. Other men the same, I'd say."

"Oh I know that, Dan. But that's not what I mean. You know it isn't. There's something in the way they look at him, and—you know they do—snicker when he isn't looking. And at me, they stare at me so queerly."

"Well, they all like you, Mrs. Fanning."

"I feel they do. Yes, Dan, I'm sure of it. But what is wrong? I must know. Won't you tell me?"

McGuire would have bitten his tongue and made it bleed rather than tell her. Possibly of all on the plantation, old Brade was the only man who did not know that Fanning thought he was the father of a black girl's recent child; and it pleased the rough white men that the girl's parents were mulcting the thrifty fellow of much canned stuff, clothes, cutlery, a wealth of presents—all as the price of silence, for Fanning feared the laughter of Kialo.

The joke was a good one, though bitter. Old Grimes had put Tiulia up to it; but even Grimes, as well as all who knew it, had a kind of pity for Mrs. Fanning. Their contempt for Fanning nevertheless gave them enjoyment of the scandalous trick.

"Now McGuire—" she was half commanding and half pleading—"I want to know. There is no need to spare my feelings, I tell you. Now tell me, won't you?"

He nodded, saying:

"It's got to you too, at last—these tropics. Imagining things. It affects most women an' some men. Sort of fever. Makes you imagine things, but wears away. You need more sleep an' a wee nip of whisky. You'd be surprized how good such a bad thing as whisky is for you."

He talked at rambling length, caused her to listen, even smile. Though she saw clearly enough that he was being merely evasive, yet she did not question him further, and presently let him escape.

McGuire was glad to be away from her, almost as if he were uneasy lest she might read his thoughts. Yet, alone, he could not help smiling for the baby was not Fannings, was not even Tiulia's, was a perfectly honest and true-born little black, which had been borrowed from Tiulia's hill-dwelling sister who sat by to ease its hunger with her breasts and to share in the spoils.

III

HERE and there the following day as McGuire rode along toward town, passing those places where he had met Reena, he fell into remembrance of what she had said, how looked, and of how in utter silence old Tomas had remained behind her like a guardian spirit—one of no great power, however, since he had let death overtake him.

At the turning of the road where it branched off and led down toward Symonds' land, McGuire paused, dismounted and let his pony crop by the wayside while he smoked thoughtfully, trying to imagine some excuse good enough to take him to Symonds' instead of on to town. He meditated this thing and that of which he might talk with Symonds while waiting the chance that Reena would give him some sign or word; but nothing trustworthy came of his meditation, for, McGuire reflected, what good would be sign or word, however explicit, since he could do nothing? The truth was, and in his reckless heart he knew it, that he had become fascinated, if not indeed infatuated, with the lonely girl.

"But only out of sympathy," he said, self-deceptively.

Sympathy gave an excuse for much thinking of her. Her woman's beauty and sweet charm that made the thinking pleasant but, since he felt frustrated, also painful. He told himself that there was no reason in common sense why he should concern himself, then answered himself with the thought that common sense was folly.

"All my life," he mused, "it's the fool things I've remembered with most pleasure. I wish to —— that Mr. Mann was from Honduras. I'd kick up a row to make this island rock!"

As he sat by the roadside he heard the gallop of a horse, coming as if one rode in flight or for a doctor.

At first McGuire thought to get quickly on his pony and be jogging along when overtaken, but the horseman was near and coming fast, and so might see him running as if guiltily for the pony that had moved some rods away, seeking the tenderest leaves. So McGuire lay against the bank, rested on an elbow and, pipe in mouth, waited.

It was Manuel who came; and instantly as he caught sight of McGuire he began jerking at the reins. He was a good rider but an inexpert horseman; though he had no great strength it was by cruel use of what strength he did have that he ruled a horse. Now, with a jerk, jerk, jerk, he wrenched the horse's head high, and loudly, as if full of angering suspicions, yelled in a thin voice:

"What are you doing here?"

It was more like a shriek than a question. The tone warned McGuire that this was not sudden anger, but indeed such anger as if Manuel had come upon what he half expected to find. So, having sensed that this was not an accidental meeting, McGuire ran his eyes up and down Manuel's slender form, then fixed his look on Manuel's face, steadily, and wondered just what to say.

"I asked what you were doing here!" Manuel cried. His voice was furious, but his tone too thin to have frightened any one as his father could frighten some men by an angry shout.

"Yes, I heard you," said McGuire, eying him closely, wondering what next and why this outburst.

"Then answer me!" Manuel yelled. Or I'll—"

He left the threat incomplete except for the staring of his leaden black eyes. Then his hand, his right hand, went inside his white silk shirt.

It had never before occurred to McGuire to have the least fear of this fool who seemed at times even an idiot, but now McGuire, with a hasty movement, thrust his own hand behind him and frowned above a narrowed gaze, saying coldly:

"I waited for you, here. Shall it be—" not following his gesture with his eyes he indicated the fat pony, nibbling leaves— "from horseback, on foot, or just as we are? You may draw first. Go on. Out with it!"

"What do you mean?" Manuel asked in another sort of voice, not at his ease, understanding very clearly what McGuire seemed to mean.

"There are no witnesses—" McGuire spoke slowly, distinctly, convincingly— "so the one that gets off alive can say the other took first shot. It's always what the one who lives says, providing he has the forethought to fire the other fellow's gun a time or two. You can see, here—" McGuire held up his left hand—"so it isn't a pipe this time. Are you ready?"

"You waited! You mean—mean to kill me!" Manuel, half shouting, asked, as if this were ambush and he, taken by surprize, was to be murdered.

"Aren't you armed?"

"No!" Manuel cried, hastily pulling his hand from inside his shirt, holding it up, empty.

"Then you haven't a gun I could leave by your body?"

"No! No! No!!" Manuel pulled at the reins, backing his horse farther and farther off, quite plainly making himself less and less of a target.

"Next time," said McGuire, "I'll bring two. One to leave by your body. And what do you mean—" his tone rose as if in high anger—"riding up an' yelling at me like that! Keep your horse still an' answer me or I'll—"

McGuire stood up, his attitude was as if about to draw and shoot.

"I thought," said Manuel fearfully, yet half afraid to bolt, and feeling too that he must explain, "you were waiting for— it won't do you any good to wait for—

you'll never meet her again! My wife—yesterday—married! If you do, I'll—"

Manuel, with the flurry of one escaping, put his horse about, struck with spurs and crop, galloping on, and across his shoulder as he fled toward the town he cried with petulant rage—

"I'll kill you!"

Then he huddled low in the saddle, leaning forward, and rode furiously.

McGuire stood and gazed toward the way he had gone long after the turn of the dusty road had taken him out of sight.

"Married? It may not be true, for he's that much the liar. But there's truth in his having learned that we did meet. Natives, —— tattlers! Saw and told. Then Tomas never fell from a horse. His head was bashed with a club! That's not a guess—I know it, knowing Zurdas! Before God, if she's married, I'll steal her myself, or try it! Such a marriage! But Manuel lied. There has been no marriage—could be none unless they married him to the woman dead!"

Thus with much that troubled his thoughts, McGuire rode on and into Port Kingston.

IV

MR. MORRIS had a comfortable home at Port Kingston. His married son attended to the near-by plantation. Tiny grandchildren played about on the wide encircling veranda of the Morris home. With impetuous galloping they interrupted consular conversations, since all business was conducted on the veranda; they broke in, not unwelcomed, upon everybody, even upon the consul's siestas, with all the assurance of tots who had never been spanked.

Mr. Morris was a full-faced man, stout. He seemed true to the type of a genial ale-quaffing, beef-eating Englishman, although he ate sparingly of meat and drank nothing stronger than coconut juice. He was kindly, generous, utterly honest, but not at all the sort of man to bully aggressive planters, and in his desire to be fair he was at times hoodwinked.

McGuire rode into the grounds surrounding Mr. Morris's house and tied the pony to the hitching ring lest he go about tasting flowers and fruit blossoms.

Almost at once there was a clatter of many feet on the veranda. Then, abruptly, silence, and two blond heads appeared above the railing, and a third child, the youngest, not tall enough to see over the rail, stooped and looked at him like a tiny prisoner peering through bars.

Of a sudden their voices rose clamorously:

"Can we ride 'im?" "Mister, can we ride?" "Gran'pa won't care!" "Gran'pa's talkin' to a man." "Gran'pa won't care." "I want a wide!"

The last remark came from a small lady of very few years, not more than two or three; and, with curls flying, down the steps she came, almost headlong, with full feminine assurance that ready hands would catch and support her. Behind her came the two small boys, clamorously.

McGuire squeezed them in lifting them as one squeezes all the little helpless baby things of the world—puppies, kittens, fledgling chickens, and small tots; he set them in a row on the fat back of the old pony, then took the reins and walked about the graveled paths. Small impatient heels struck at the pony's sides, clucks and "gidups" came and the baby girl being in front, demanded the reins and got them. Hers was an imperious right over men; but the old pony, being sensible, would not even to please her stir out of a walk.

When they returned to the front of the house, Mr. Morris stood there, benevolent and elderly, bareheaded, dressed in fresh white duck.

The children shouted with gleeful explanation that they had been for a ride, and the smallest, the wee bit of a girl baby pointed a finger at McGuire and announced:

"Him wery nice man, Gran'pa!"

Then she pitched herself headlong into her grandfather's out-stretched hands.

The children trudged up the steps, reached the veranda and went scampering away.

"So," said Mr. Morris, nodding, "one hour you waylay a gentleman, meaning to do him bodily harm, and the next, McGuire, you play with babies! You are a very difficult fellow to understand, indeed!"

Though Mr. Morris' face was of a benevolent cast, and though he now smiled slightly, yet he did not show friendliness. There was reserve, even disapproval, in his bearing.

McGuire made the mistake of grinning slightly as he asked:

"An' now what's Manuel been at you about?"

"You know well enough. He came breathlessly a little while ago to tell me that he met you on the highway, and you presented a gun as he spurred by you. Bad work, McGuire. Very bad! Especially in the light of other things that have—"

"How many times was he shot at? Did he say, or was he too scared to remember?"

"He did not say that you shot at him," Mr. Morris replied, not at all liking McGuire's ease, almost impudence. "It is serious enough that you threatened his life and drew a gun! He put spurs to horse and got beyond you before—"

"He'll never make a success as a liar, that fellow, try as he does!"

"Do you mean to try to tell me—"

McGuire interrupted:

"To tell you just how it was, yes! On the road I heard him coming. I thought it best to show him my face instead of my back since there has been a little trouble between us—"

At that Mr. Morris, eying McGuire with an unfavorable expression, nodded significantly.

"—so I sat and waited. He pulled up, and in a tone that would've warned anybody to look out for 'im, squeakily yelled what was I doing there? As if I haven't the right to loaf by the roadside when I please. He put his hand inside his shirt. Maybe he was scratching a flea. I don't know. But I scratched my hip an' said I waited for him, then asked if he was armed. He said no, an' bolted. He never saw a gun! I didn't have one. But he sure thought he was going to be shot. You believed the story Manuel told. How much of mine do you believe, Mr. Morris?"

Mr. Morris shook his head doubtfully, coughed, put a fumbling hand into a side coat pocket and for some moments looked at McGuire with the frowning displeasure of one who knows far more than has yet been admitted. He was not a man proud of authority; he was even tolerant, but McGuire's effrontery displeased him, and this especially because he knew, or thought he did, just how much of a rascal McGuire was.

Mr. Morris gravely said:

"You have done him real injury, McGuire, though—"

"By scaring him, you mean?"

"No," Mr. Morris, with irritation, replied and with a gesture seemed to indicate that he was not to be interrupted. More sternly he said, "you have done him a real injury by meeting his wife on the highway and—"

"Wife!"

"They were married yesterday!"

"I don't believe it!"

"I was present!"

"Ah! The British Consul assisted at the marriage of Reena Symonds with an idiot!"

"McGuire!" Mr. Morris' face had an explosive expression.

"Well, you know he is."

"I don't care to listen!"

"Would you let daughter of yours marry a thing like that? Would you?"

"McGuire, I will not listen—"

"No, by ——, you wouldn't and you know it. You'd stop it somehow. Cut his throat—or hers! He's half idiot! You know he is."

"I will not listen, sir, to more of your jealous expressions, McGuire!"

"My jealous—!" McGuire laughed into Mr. Morris' hot angered face. "You think I've never looked in a mirror? I know who I am—what I am! Jealous? Good guess you've made!" McGuire swore bitterly.

"Such talk, McGuire, does not in the least help you, does not in the least help you!" said Mr. Morris hastily.

"Then tell me this. You were at the wedding. Didn't they have her chained, gagged, and a whip over her? Men say you never lie. Did she look pleased?"

Mr. Morris was very angry, but he was an honest man and had self-control.

"No. No," he said, but admitted nothing more, though he had to recall that Reena had stood immobilely sullen, very erect, and that, though her dark eyes had not wavered before any man's face, she would neither affirm nor reply to a word addressed to her by the missionary-magistrate who treated her silence indeed as if he had not noticed. All of which was explicable, and had been previously explained by her father to both Mr. Morris and to Mr. Cullum, the magistrate.

Reena, Mr. Symonds had said, was, as they knew, subject to moods when not quite herself. Of late her fancy had been strangely affected—corrupted in fact!—by that scoundrel McGuire. The first notice of this was the day of the race; but just how far matters had gone was learned only the day before. Some natives had told Zurdas McGuire was meeting her often on the road. Tomas, questioned by Zurdas, had confessed. Then Tomas, to ease his regret at the part he had played, got drunk, so drunk he had fallen from his horse, and unluckily fallen head-first on a rock. It was on account of McGuire that the marriage must be hastened. It had been arranged years previously. Yes, yes indeed, Reena had said that she was willing, but she was—ah, they understood! It was too bad—but every one understood.

Mr. Morris, being an old islander, was not ritualistic. He had large tolerance for the planter caste. Besides, an American father's disposal of a daughter in marriage was not anything that could possibly attract consular interference; the relation between Zurdas and Symonds was well known, the marriage had long been expected.

As if, with a sentence, to crush McGuire's suspicions and objections, the unworthy cause of which Mr. Morris believed he understood perfectly, he said:

"The wedding was here, late yesterday afternoon. By Judge Cullum here in my house."

There was a glare like the fore-warning of something wildly rash in McGuire's eyes. He stared in silence, but his tongue trembled with Reena's story, as confirmed by the unfortunate Preston woman. Within him was the urge, almost overpowering, to throw this story, with all its tragedies, to the consul.

But McGuire, though seldom angered, even in anger felt the presence of that cool wary calculating part of his brain that made him so trickily deceptive; and he realized wisely the folly, especially at such a time as this, of making serious and unprovable charges. Even were Reena given the chance to affirm what he said, all would say that she was mad and he a liar in saying he had believed her.

All he did say now was—

"How well she knew you were no friend of hers!" That stung Mr. Morris deeply, for he liked Reena and had regretted the marriage. But this was a regret that he most certainly would not acknowledge to such a felllow as this McGuire.

Mr. Morris wished for some rebuke that would smother his impudence. He regarded McGuire with stern disapproval, but at the same time his hand again, a little reluctantly, went to his side coat pocket and fiddled with something inside. He spoke with dignity and earnestness, saying:

"You had better mend your ways, McGuire, or you will find yourself deported. There have been many complaints. There have been complaints even from your superintendent, Fanning. Old Brade himself, I am sure, would approve if he knew all that—"

"Fanning! Manuel! Symonds! Zurdas! As British Consul, why don't you play fair? You believe all the other liars, why not me?"

"I simply will not listen—" Mr. Morris began, jerking his hand from the coat

pocket and lifting it as a trembling fist.

"And you're right! I ought to be deported. I've quit even blackbirding. I'm a —— beachcomber. All I do now for board an' room is read the Bible!"

"No such talk, McGuire!" Mr. Morris fairly shook with exasperation. "I am not a narrow man, but I refuse to listen to blasphemous mockery!"

"So? Then why didn't you speak up when you listened to Cullum binding Reena Symonds in God's name to a half-breed black she hates!"

"You, you scoundrel, you! Scoundrel!" Mr. Morris shouted, with both fists trembling shoulder high. He glared as if about to seize McGuire and do all that anger urged.

Then he turned abruptly to stride away, but even in turning his hand, as if of itself returned to his pocket. He stopped, hesitated, drew out a letter, stared at it, then faced about and held out the letter. His extended hand shook, his voice even trembled a little as he said hastily:

"Here. Here! I promised to deliver this. I promised before I knew what was wanted. I keep promises, even those unwise—though in this case I—but here! Here, if you want it, take it!"

McGuire looked toward the letter, at first making no move to reach for it. Mr. Morris held it at arm's length, nervously urging it upon him.

"What's that? For me? Who from?" McGuire inquired.

"From Reena," said Mr. Morris with a tone of protest even while putting the letter nearer.

McGuire, doubtful, took it quickly. It bore his name. He turned it over, half in puzzlement and, though not looking closely, saw a faint smear-like trace that caused him then to hold the envelop near his eyes and examine it. The flap was sealed, but—

"You've opened an' read it, have you?"

McGuire was past caring about consular friendliness.

"I have not, have not! I have not, sir!"

The denial was explicit, and Mr. Morris was an honest man, but there was a slight uneasy unconvincing inflection in the denial. He seemed about to say something more, something explanatory, for he appeared to feel more embarrassment than indignation at a charge which should have made so mild a man, even in his mildest moments, wrathful.

Turning his back, he still hesitated for an instant, then strode off hurriedly, and at that moment McGuire was convinced that Mr. Morris had indeed steamed open and resealed the letter.

McGuire ripped with forefinger at the envelop, tearing it with zigzag rents, took out the letter, shook it open. A hasty reading, and he felt he really owed Mr. Morris, who had gone up to the veranda and disappeared, at least a slight apology.

Reena had written:

My only friend:

This afternoon I must marry Manuel and I must see you. You must come to see me because now that Tomas is dead there is no other way, and I must see you. Come as soon as you can. Come at night and tap at my screen and I will hear you for I do not sleep, and though I shall be married I will be alone—or dead, which I do almost wish now. I want to see you because I have something to tell you that you must know. I can't write more now and I want to see you.

—Reena

There was a postscript and McGuire thought it was perhaps for this that Reena had unsealed her envelop. The postscript was:

They know I have been seeing you on the road and though they have promised not to hurt you I am afraid. You must be careful, but come, please!

"This night I go!" said McGuire at once, and reread the letter. "Promised not to hurt me? Aye, I wonder? Was that the bargain to make her marry him?"

He swore, feeling she had been greatly cheated, for his was, anyhow, much the assurance of a charmed life. Besides, if his guess were true, he knew that from Zurdas she had bought only a faithless promise.

"I've dodged far worse than Zurdas, but none ever married worse than Zurdas' son!"

McGuire meant to go. He was not timid, but, given warning, he was very cautious about the hazards that he took. To go straight by the road, even in the dark, might be luckless, for people passed that way. At all hours of night, Symonds' men were stumbling to and fro between the plantation and the town's beach shanties. Otherwise he foresaw nothing much of a risk, except from such uncertainty as there might be in moving about in the dark on unfamiliar ground near the house. But once he had reached the house he could approach the veranda and talk in whisperings through the screen.

Unquestionably, he thought, she meant to run from Manuel. Unquestionably, McGuire meant to help. He would tell her so, and would assure her that within a few days he would busily think up how best to go about it. With David and the schooner gone, McGuire could not have much trustworthy help; but he was self-confident and resourceful. And even as he stood with the letter in his hand before Mr. Morris' steps he almost decided that if the best thing he could think of was no better than calling in old Grimes he would do even that; for Grimes of late had been boasting of how recklessly evil and joyous too was his friend, a pearler, now anchored in the bay and trying to coax him to go poaching. But Grimes delayed, he said, until he had heard men laugh at Fanning:

"Miss that? Not for all the pearls an oyster ever saw!"

Grimes would help. McGuire was sure of it, for Grimes carried an old grudge against Zurdas, even more against Manuel, since it was Manuel's lie that had, when Grimes worked for Symonds, got him a thrashing and discharge.

But even as he thought of it, McGuire shook his head and said to himself:

"No. That won't do. Not even if it seems the only way. I'd rather trust the devil with my soul than Grimes with such a girl! Huh! Like me at my age, was he? And Mrs. Fanning wonders if I'll be like him, at his? ——! If I look ahead at what seems true, no doubt of it, I'll be another Grimes. When a fellow goes the same way, he brings up at last in the same place as those that have gone before. But what the——! So be it!"

Still holding the open letter, McGuire mounted the steps and turned at that corner where he had seen Mr. Morris disappear. He walked the length of the veranda and stopped before Mr. Morris who sat and fanned himself and puffed, still overheated by anger. He looked up with inimical surprize at McGuire.

"What I came today for, Mr. Morris, was to say that Brade has cane cuttings ready. He asked that I tell you. An' too, I ought to say I'm sorry I suspected you opened my letter. I know —— well you didn't. If you'd read it, you wouldn't 've given it to me! Thank you."

Mr. Morris' hand with the fan fell away and hung loosely at his side, and he stared so open-mouthed that McGuire misread the astonishment as surprize at the apology. Then, with some confusion, Mr. Morris gasped:

"I—I don't understand. I—no, I didn't read the letter but—it's all right, I think. All right. Yes, I know it's all right! And you remember what I told you, McGuire. You mend your ways. I was never so insulted in my life. Never before in my life!"

McGuire recklessly retorted—

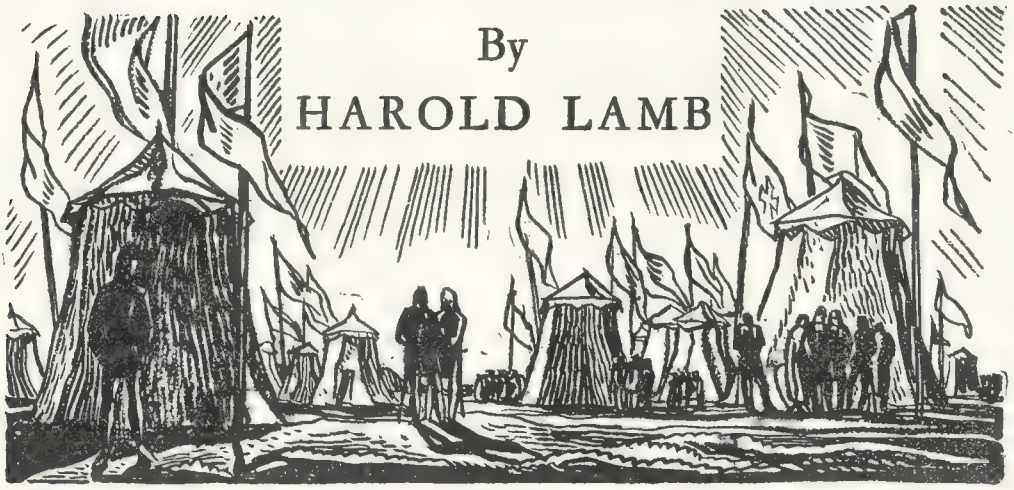
"An' never before—did you—marry a white girl to a black!" Then, cramming the letter into his pocket, he turned about and left.

TO BE CONTINUED

The Princess of the Steppe and the Mongol Horde

Rusudan

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE



By

HAROLD LAMB

In one day the veil shall be torn from the temple, and the chests of the miser be rent open; then women's tongues shall be silent, and a fool will mourn loudly, and friend shall look upon friend, unspeaking—for one day is a thousand years. —ARAB PROVERB

CHAPTER I

IT WAS Avak the shepherd who first beheld the miracle—Avak and his dog. In that year, the year of Our Lord 1222, the winter was a hard time and snow fell heavily in the higher ranges so that the *khodas*, or trails, were almost blocked. For this reason Avak kept his fat-tail sheep and goats penned up. Avak had built around his pens a fence of oak limbs, high and sturdy enough to keep out the wolves that sometimes ventured into the street of the village. So he was at liberty to spend most of his days watching for enemies.

His hut was on the outskirts of the village of Nakha in the foothills of the Khaukesh, beneath the ranges that stretched from the Black Sea to the Caspian. Through these ranges ran the highway that led from Asia to the threshold of Europe—though Avak knew or cared little about that matter. To him, the highway was a source of trouble. And he relished fighting.

Avak, being the head of his family, had more than one feud on his hands. In the last harvest-time a Cherkessian horse-trader who had stopped overnight at Nakha had sworn to come back and cut out his heart and other organs. Avak had not stolen the trader's bald-faced Kabarda mare. The shepherd was not clever enough to steal; but he was much too proud to refuse a quarrel when it came his way.

And the four Ermeni*—Avak's mild brown eyes glinted when he thought of

* Armenians.

"*Rusudan*," *copyright*, 1927, *by Harold Lamb.*

them. Four ragged and hungry Ermeni who had wandered up the road, one at a time. The first had asked why Avak kept such a starved dog, at the same time pointing out a small sheep that had strayed from the flock. Avak had said that it was a sheep and not a dog. But when two other men had stopped and told him that it was indeed a dog, and an evil looking beast, he had been doubtful. And he had believed the fourth, who swore that the beast had been bewitched by a pagan sorcerer. This fourth Ermeni had carried off the sheep, unharmed.

Avak had bought holy water to sprinkle his flock, and—when he learned that the four wanderers had eaten the sheep in the village—he remembered the saying of his people that two Greeks are a match for a devil, and one Ermeni is a match for two devils.

So he kept an eye out for the four wanderers—himself a Georgian and a sword bearer, and a descendent of the Orphelians who had carried sword and fire over all the Khaukesh* in by-gone generations. The evidence of his nobility was the blade itself, a heavy *yataghan* in a leather sheath hanging from his shoulder by a strap ornamented with all the silver coins Avak had been able to get together.

And, as his father had done before him, Avak watched the mountain road for enemies—his personal adversaries and the foes of the blessed young queen of the Georgians.

The Road of the Warriors, it was called, this narrow track that wound up from the wide steppes to the east. And on this Road of the Warriors Avak had seen all that came out of the east—the laden camels of Bokharians plodding in the dust of midsummer, the donkey trains of purple-clad Jews, the creaking carts of turbaned Hindus. By night he had caught fleeting glimpses of raiding Turkoman horsemen.

But this road that came out of the unknown East had been deserted since the first snow. Until the day of the miracle.

Then Avak, going out to his aerie, had beheld with keen eyes a change in the aspect of the plain beneath. The gray surface of the steppe was covered with round black objects like tiny domes. And between these objects moved specks that were men. Here and there were dark blurs that changed shape as he watched, and he knew instinctively that these must be horse herds, or perhaps cattle.

After a while he reasoned that the black domes must be tents, of a kind he had never beheld. He did not know how to count over a hundred and so he told the priest in Nakha that there were many hundreds of foemen camped on the plain under the mountains of Georgia, and the priest had agreed that this was so.

"Eh, Avak, it is true that last night I saw in the sky a fiery cross. Now it is clear that this was an omen. There will be war in the Khaukesh."

"In that case," agreed the shepherd, "crows will eat the flesh of the foemen. Aye, the wolf packs will not go unfed."

He had heard his father tell how the hosts of Islam had tried to force the mountain rampart in the day of the prophet Muhammad, and how in the end they had failed. He himself had seen armies of the Persian *atabegs* come up one valley or another, only to draw back licking their wounds.

It was the glory and the pride of the Georgians that they had never submitted, like the Armenians and Circassians, to a monarch of Islam. In their mountain fastness they still worshiped the Cross that had come to them in the days of the apostles, and they were still unconquered.

Now, Avak reflected, messengers would be sent forth by the young queen to all

*The Caucasus, that separates Europe and Asia

the distant clans; the banners would be lifted at Tphilis* and trumpets would blare from ridge to ridge.

He was not surprized when Shotha Kupri, a *thawad*, or prince of the kingdom, came to the frontier village of Nakha with his henchmen to keep watch on the invaders.

Shotha Kupri was a grizzled nobleman, the clasp of his cloak being two bronze eagles, and Avak gave him a fat-tailed sheep without payment, because after all it was a Jew's part in life to haggle, and a Georgian's to bear himself boldly in war. Like the shepherd, Shotha Kupri was astonished when he beheld the thousands of black domes on the plain by the river; but he said nothing.

He sent two men down to spy upon the strange encampment, and the two men did not return.

Then came a storm of wind and snow, and after that days of heavy mist. Avak still went daily to his aerie because he wanted to be the first to see one of the invaders appear out of the mist.

IT WAS late in the afternoon, and Avak, huddled in his sheepskin *burka*, was drowsing comfortably when his dog growled, and the shepherd got to his feet to peer down the road.

Fog, driven by a fitful wind, hid the tips of the firs and swirled through the gaunt gray limbs of oaks. Wraiths of mist danced up the narrow lane in the forest mesh that was the road. Avak could hear nothing except the rush of the wind, but when the mist lifted for a moment he saw a man coming up the road—a tall man wrapped in a wolf-skin cloak, who strode steadily through the drifts and paused at times to study the tracks upon the trail.

The stranger wore no helm and carried no shield. His right hand grasped a stout staff. And it seemed to Avak as if he bore on his shoulders a cross, because above his black sable cap projected a long and gleaming bar of metal.

Avak could not be certain, in that ever-changing mist, whether the stranger was alone or followed by others. So the shepherd flung back his head and howled like a wolf—a quavering cry that was carried far up-wind. Then he took his dog between his knees and crouched down in the laurel growth that screened him from the road.

When he heard leather-shod feet crunch the hard snow he peered out of his covert and beheld the stranger close at hand. Then Avak knew beyond doubt that this was no Georgian. The man of the wolf-skin cloak was taller than the race of mountaineers, and spare in build. His beard and thick long hair were the hue of red gold.

And what Avak had taken to be a cross was in reality the two-foot hilt and the wide cross-bar of a sword slung in its leather sheath upon his shoulders.

"He carries himself with pride," thought Avak. "*Ai*, what a blade. The *thawad* will rejoice in this captive."

The stranger had halted for good reason. Out of a mass of young firs appeared five Georgians, come to learn the meaning of Avak's signal that had been heard in the huts of Nakha; four warriors armed with boar spears and simitars, and Shotha Kupri, broad as a bear, with high shoulders and limbs shaped and knotted by climbing cliffs.

Thus reinforced, Avak emerged from hiding, and circled to the back of the stranger, who glanced at him once from bleak gray eyes.

Shotha Kupri advanced to spear's length of the man in the wolfskins, and stopped to chew his mustache in a moment of contemplation.

"Hail!" he cried.

The stranger shook his head, and made answer in another tongue, sonorous and musical:

"*Yah kawánnah?* What men are ye?"

Only Shotha Kupri understood the words, and he frowned, for the stranger had addressed him in Arabic, the common speech of half Asia.

"Thy masters!" cried the *thawad* harshly. "What seek ye?"

*Now called Tiflis.

"A road."

Shotha Kupri grinned.

"A spy art thou, from the dog-pack below. Throw down thy weapon and yield thee, and by the beard of thy prophet, I will show thee a road! Else wilt thou tread the path to Jehannum."

The stranger lifted his right hand, as if about to speak again, but the Georgian signed to his men.

"Seize him!"

Avak saw one of the henchmen draw a simitar and flourish it at the stranger's head, while another ran in to grasp his arms. Skilled were they in facing the rush of a wild boar, or in leaping out of cover upon feudal enemies that ventured into the Khaukesh, and Avak thought that the tall man was as good as bound and trussed, for he made no move to draw the long sword at his back.

Instead, he dropped his right hand to his staff. Stepping back a pace, he thrust the blunt end of the staff into the stalwart throat of the warrior who leaped to grapple him. Then, slipping both hands to the end of the pole, he brought it swiftly against the simitar blade near the hilt.

The blade snapped and with a strident *whirr* the point shot into the snow. Avak yelped with surprize, because he knew well how to handle a cudgel, but until now he had never seen the play of a long quarter-staff. The next moment the shepherd lay prone beside the warrior, who coughed and fingered his throat tenderly. The man in the wolf-skins had turned and whirled his oaken weapon down on Avak's temple. A light blow, but it drew blood and the trees and the men merged together in the mist before Avak's eyes.

Then the stranger laughed.

"O ye men of the mountain, this is no time for the sword!"

But the muscles tensed in Shotha Kupri's broad face, and he drew from his belt a heavy ax.

"Whoso thou art, draw thy sword ere I strike thee down!"

The *thawad* motioned back the three warriors who had started forward at the first blows. His anger was roused and he meant to try the stranger with edged steel. His left hand slipped down to his boot-top and gripped a curved knife. Holding both weapons close to his sides, he bent his head.

Before he could rush in, Avak cried out—

" 'Ware, my Lord!"

Out of the veil of mist a dozen riders were urging their horses at a plunging gallop up the road. Avak glanced at them again, and rolled over, gaining his feet at the side of his prince, where the Georgians had gathered in a knot.

In all his days Avak had never seen horsemen like these, who were garbed in dark leather, shining with lacquer, under long loose *khalats* or fur surtouts—tiger-skins, sable, and silver and black fox. Their helmets were bronze or polished Damascus-work, crested with red horse-hair. Their high-peaked saddles gleamed with silver-work, and the horses were utterly unlike the bony little beasts of the Khaukesh—jet black Kabardas, mottled gray Arabs, splendid mounts that would have made the Circassian traders finger their wallet strings. And the riders were fitting arrows to string as they reined in by the man of the wolf-skin.

"Go back, my Lord!" Avak cried to the *thawad*. "We will stand against them."

"Nay," growled Shotha Kupri, gripping his ax.

But no arrows smote the Georgians. The tall stranger spoke a brief word to the riders and they slipped their shafts back into the quivers, gazing at the mountaineers with slant eyes expressionless as those of the horses they bestrode. The man of the broadsword mounted a led horse, a powerful gray stallion, and gathered up his reins.

He glanced up the road at the thatched roofs of Nakha from which other Georgians were beginning to throng.

"Say, now," he asked bluntly, "thou of the ax—to what country leads this road?"

Old Shotha Kupri was no man to do another's bidding. Fearless and untamed was he, as the eagles of the higher ranges.

"To purgatory—for an infidel!"

And he spat into the trampled snow.

The gray eyes of the stranger dwelt upon the grim Georgian an instant.

"A vain word," he made answer quietly, "avails not. Go, with thy life, and by that same token bear this message to thy people: There is one at your gate who heeds not God or Satan or any power of earth!"

CHAPTER II

THE ENVOY

THE one of whom the stranger spoke was a Mongol. This invader from the far east resembled Shotha Kupri in body, having high shoulders and the barrel of a bear. But there the resemblance ceased. Subotai, the Mongol, was long of body and his short legs curved inward as if the years he had spent in the saddle of a horse had shaped them so. His bony, weather-beaten head was massive, and his greenish eyes gleamed with good humor that changed in an instant to anger.

Earlier that afternoon, before the stranger had appeared to Avak out of the fog, Subotai might have been seen as he talked with his officers in the Mongol camp. Subotai Bahadur, surnamed *Orluk*,* and leader of a Horde, sat at ease in his tent, having before his eyes all that he considered pleasant, even luxurious.

On the great teak pole of the pavilion were hung the banners of the princes he had overthrown and put to death in the last two years—eventful years, even for the Orluk, who was the favorite of that scourge of Asia, Genghis Khan. He counted two Persian banners, richly gilded, and the horned standard of the erstwhile Lord of Islam, Muhammad Shah. He had chased Muhammad across half Asia, and it always amused the veteran Mongol that the Lion of Islam had died of fright in a fishing boat and had been buried in his shirt for a shroud.

For Subotai, whose name was whispered in terror by Moslem lips from Delhi to Jerusalem, enjoyed a jest. Born in the bleak Gobi desert, he had herded horses through blizzards and hunted tigers afoot in the barrens; the thews of his body were like steel. He could keep the saddle of a horse for three days without dismounting, save to open a vein in his mount and slake his hunger with warm blood. And he who had hunted in childhood the beasts of the northland now hunted down men with keener zest.

He had learned the craft of war from Genghis Khan; he had reined his horse over the battlefields of Cathay, and had coursed a *Gur-khan* across the Roof of the World. It did not enter his head to wonder why the Mongols had been able to conquer half the world. God ruled supreme in the sky, he knew, and the Kha Khan of the Mongols upon earth.

No more than twenty thousand Mongols were encamped around Subotai's *yurta*, but these were veteran cavalry, the survivors of twenty campaigns and a hundred battles. Some of their officers were seated on the benches by the *yurta* entrance—broad-faced, scarred Mongols, regimental commanders, tall princes of Cathay in wadded silks embroidered with the dragon, hawk-eyed nomad chieftains of the steppes.

To one of these Subotai spoke in his deep drawl—

"*Il-khan*, what thing upon earth can give the utmost pleasure?"

The officer addressed folded his arms, meditated and replied with a Mongol's brevity—

"A fine horse under you, a strong-winged hawk on the wrist and a clear field for the sport."

With this a Cathayan disagreed courteously—

"O Khan, that is true; yet it is likewise true that the greatest delight is to gaze upon a conquered foe, choosing the fairest of the girls for slaves and harkening to the lamentation of the women."

"Not so," Subotai remarked. "It is best to outwit and break the strength of an enemy, as the wind presses down the high grass."

* Eagle. One of the eleven high officers of the Mongol Army.

The Cathayan, who had been overcome in very much that fashion in his day, made response swiftly and boldly, as he had learned to do since he became a warrior of the Horde.

"Subotai may say that, but I, an unworthy servant, am not a Subotai."

The Eagle, not ill-pleased, fell silent. Seldom did he indulge in such lengthy conversation. He liked praise, but was savagely impatient of deceit. And in the words spoken by this Mongol Orluk rested the fate of nations and the survival of human races—upon the will of this commander of the advance of Genghis Khan.

Subotai had chosen for winter quarters a wide plain that was sheltered on the west and north by lofty mountain ranges. He had provided his men with cattle, with fodder for the horse herds, with captives to serve them. With the first coming of grass he meant to ride to the west, to invade and crush a place called Europe.

His thoughts took another turn. Arms folded on his knees, he glanced at the man who sat nearest him on the carpet by the *yurta* fire—a dark and wistful Syrian, a physician and sage.

"Rabban Simeon," he said, "who is the lord of the Christians that dwell under the setting sun?"

The Syrian's knowledge of the unknown world in the west as much as his skill at healing had won him the respect of the Mongols, and he reflected while he chose words to make the matter clear to the leader of the Horde.

"Mighty Lord," he vouchsafed at length, "there are two rulers of the Christians. One is the *Il-khan* of their church who is called Pope and sends his orders to kings by barefoot priests—though he is very rich—"

"Of what use are many precious stones and gold that is hoarded in cellars? Can men become hardier by wearing the jewels or their children sturdier by gold?"

Rabban Simeon waived the question.

"The other ruler is the emperor of the Greeks. His is the throne of the Cæsars in the great city of Constantinople."

"Can there be two suns in the sky, or two khans in the same pasture-land? *Kai!* They must strive, one with the other, for mastery."

"Indeed it is as your Mightiness says. The one called the Pope has warred with the emperor for many ages of men."

"*Hai!* Then there has been a great slaying and a driving forth of cattle and a wailing of women when the flames roar."

The gentle Syrian pondered, fingering his beard. He dreaded the hour when the invincible Mongols should enter the fertile valleys of Armenia and the ancient cities of the Greeks.

"O Khan," quoth he, "the custom of these rulers is otherwise. When they make war they buy barbarian soldiery with gold; they seize the ships that go upon the seas; they send spies to learn the secrets of the other, and by fair promises they seek to lead their enemy into a trap. Above all, they strive to draw into their hand the fruits of commerce—grain and rice and oil and wine and the silks of Cathay and the fine weapons of Damascus. For by commerce gold is got, and gold gives to these rulers their power."

Subotai grunted.

"*Athor*," he made answer, "O healer, when fertile earth is overgrown with weeds it bears no good grass, but when hot fire scorches it the grass is good."

Rabban Simeon shivered, but the Mongol's curiosity had been aroused.

"Tell me this—"he went on. "Are the Pope and emperor Nazarenes—Christians, men of the Cross?"

"Aye, my Lord."

"How can that be? I have seen a Christian. When he is angry he growls like thunder, he bites like a camel."

"If your Mightiness speaks of the warrior, the Swooping Hawk, he is a barbarian, a man without learning, bred to the sword."

"He has kept faith; his word is not smoke."

"That is to be seen," observed Rabban Simeon shrewdly. "Is he not captive, though unchained, in the Horde? A captive's word is more often given than kept."

Subotai considered this in silence.

"The Swooping Hawk has sworn vengeance against this khan of the Greeks, whose empire lies in the path I will follow."

Wrapping his cloak about him, the troubled Syrian drew closer to the fire of glowing dung and dried moss that filled the pavilion with pungent smoke. Above all things he wished to turn the thoughts of the Mongol chieftain from invasion of the Greek empire, upon the outskirts of which clustered the remnants of his people, and the Hebrews and Armenians who had escaped the terrors of Moslem conquest.

"*Ai*, my Lord, has the Swooping Hawk blinded you with the beating of his wings? Surely he would lead the Horde to destruction. Already he has drawn the sword—a vassal!—against his emperor. Such treachery is a mortal sin. Now he has sworn obedience to the greatest of emperors, Genghis Khan, and he is making ready a trap for the Horde. Even now he has gone beyond your sight to make the trap—"

Subotai's green eyes gleamed, and the stout sandalwood chair creaked under his weight as he signed to the officer nearest the *yurta* entrance.

"To the commander of the horse herds, my order is this: Send a ten of riders to track down the Swooping Hawk and bring him to my *yurta*."

When he had heard the thud of hoofs on muddy snow, Subotai fixed his eyes on the pallid Syrian. The Mongol was a figure to inspire dread in any captive, looming gigantic in the firelight, his long red hair bound in two braids on his high shoulders, his body clad in soft shagreen, his stubby hands projecting from wide sleeves of black silk.

"Speak," he commanded, "and forget not that death is the punishment for false testimony as well as treachery."

And Rabban Simeon spoke of the peril that lay before the Horde. Well he knew that the terrible Orluk weighed every word. First he pointed toward the western wall of the pavilion, hung with woven Persian tapestry.

"Your eyes, O Lord of the East, have beheld yonder ramparts of the mountains. Beyond are still greater ranges whose summits enter the clouds, where snow lies always. Now the higher passes are snow-filled, and in summer the heat and the rush of the torrents makes the way impassible for armies.

"Aye, your cavalry would be stripped of its power in the gorges of the Khaukesh. In other days Arab and Seljuk Turk entered the gorges, and few rode back whence they came. Know, O Khan, that the warlike people of the Khaukesh have keen weapons and stout hearts. They will make a stand on every crag of this valley of the Kur that is the gateway to their city."

Subotai nodded.

"And beyond the ranges—what?"

"The sea! The Negropont or Black Sea—the heart of the Greek empire. The ships that go upon this sea are the Greeks'. The Horde can not catch the ships with its lariats, or sail them."

Again Subotai signified assent by silence. His Mongols were neither rivermen nor mariners.

"And know, my Lord," went on the Syrian, raising lean hands over his silk skull-cap, "that the ruling cities of the emperor lie at the far end of this sea—Constantinople and the Golden Chersonese."

The Mongol looked inquisitive and Rabban Simeon hastened to explain.

"The summer pleasure palace of the emperor that glows like fire upon the sea, being neither island nor mainland, but an edifice of dead kings; shining alabaster and marble, surmounted with gardens wherein the trees are of silver and the very song-birds are fashioned of gold and precious stones."

"Are its walls high?"

"What need, my Lord?" The Syrian, gaining confidence, smiled in his beard. "Aye, they were built by Mithridates, a monarch who fought with the Roman Cæsars. And the Greeks guard it with their cursed fire that came, assuredly, from Eblis, because it can be made to fly through the air and may not be

quenched. But how can the Golden Chersonese be approached save by sea? The Greeks number more thousands than you have hundreds."

For a moment the destroyer of men and nations gazed into the eyes of the healer.

"It was the *yassa*," responded the nomad chieftain, "the order of the *Kha Khan*, to rein our horses to the west so that we shall return and tell him what manner of people and lands lie under the setting sun."

Rabban Simeon clutched his beard and moaned, for the *yassa* of Genghis Khan was the unalterable law of the warriors of the horde.

"*Ail* My Khan, you will not return!" He sought inwardly for a reason and found one. "God Himself has raised these barriers against your host—the mountains and the sea."

"The strength of Heaven," assented Subotai, "is greater than the largest rocks or the deepest waters. I have seen Its fires in the sky*." And he added calmly, "Without this strength how could the *Kha Khan* have plucked out the Moslem empires like rotting herbs from the ground?"

Into the agile brain of the physician flashed the outcry of stricken Islam.

"Verily," he made answer, "the sins of the Moslems were many and God sent upon them a scourge."

Subotai looked down at his sword that lay in its polished ivory sheath upon his broad knees, a blade that could cut through the frail body of Rabban Simeon at a single sweep.

"Upon this side the mountains," he asked, "or that?"

Not for the first time, the savant was at loss to reply to the nomad. So, as all philosophers had done since the day of Peter the Apostle, he made a distinction.

"Upon the Moslems."

"And not upon the Christians beyond the mountains?"

"God's will be done!"

The green eyes of the Mongol glowed with anger or inward amusement.

*The Northern Lights.

"*Athor*, your words are foxes that run first one way then another. When the pyramids of the dead are heaped, and they who yet live take the saddles from their ponies, we shall know the will of Heaven."

And Rabban Simeon shivered, drawing closer to the smoldering dung.

"And of the Swooping Hawk," Subotai demanded, "what is your word?"

"O Khan, he is a warrior of the Cross. Now he is hooded and chained,* but when he finds himself among his Christian folk he will escape and betray the Horde. Why not? Instead of sitting in the *yurta* of the standards, he goes forth afoot and in secret. Never can you make of him a Mongol; he longs for his own land."

"He has sworn obedience to the *Kha Khan*." Subotai considered. "*Kai*, we will try his faith! If his word is no more than smoke, he will vanish, like an arrow shot into thick rushes. I have talked enough."

And Rabban Simeon, touching his fingers to his forehead, lips and breast, withdrew from the pavilion of the Eagle.

THE embers of the *yurt* fire still glowed, and Subotai slept not when the entrance flap was lifted and the tall warrior of the wolf-skins stood before the Mongol. His deep-throated salutation roused the chieftains who were slumbering on the benches.

"*Ahatoul*"

His long sword had been left without the pavilion, as the law of the Horde ordained, but when he lifted his arm, the wolf-skin fell away and revealed the chain hauberk, and loose coif of a crusader, and the broad leather belt, set with silver plates, of a knight.

Subotai motioned him to approach, and looked full into the gray eyes of the stranger.

"Hugh," he said, and spoke the name as if it were the whirring of wings, "you were not at my side. You were not in the *orda*. What then did you seek?"

*The hood was kept on a falcon, which was strapped or chained to the gantlet of its owner until the moment when it was tossed up within sight of its quarry.

"A road."

Subotai nodded, and waited.

"A road leads," explained the crusader, "from the Kur to the mountain villages. It was told me that we may go by this road to the summit of the pass."

"Have you spoken with the men of these hills?"

"Aye, one knew the speech of the Arabs."

"Good!"

Subotai scanned the lean face of the man called Hugh—the corded throat, the strongly marked jaw and forehead—with appreciation. There was beauty in the dark countenance framed in its mane of tawny hair, and pride in the poise of the head, but the Mongol weighed only the direct glance of the eyes, the strength of mighty arms. He drew from his girdle a tablet a little smaller than his hand, a silver plaque on which was etched a falcon and a few words of Chinese writing.

"The *paizah*," he said bluntly, "the tablet of command for an envoy of the Horde."

"Aye."

Hugh knew that this falcon tablet would obtain for the bearer fresh horses, guides, an escort or any amount of food from the Khaukesh to Cathay.

"Take it," went on Subotai. "I have a task for the Swooping Hawk. Go before the Horde as ambassador. Go first to the khan of these mountains. Say to him this, 'Our horses are swift, our arrows sharp, and our hearts hard as yonder mountains. It is ours to command; his to obey. Let him not not molest us when we pass over the roads of his kingdom.' "

"I have heard." The crusader fixed the words in his mind, and then spoke boldly, "The men of the Khaukesh are not sheep, to be driven; they will stand their ground like watch-dogs. Better to offer them conditions of peace than to lose many warriors, many horses."

Subotai grunted, a little astonished. The Horde was not in the habit of offering terms to foes with weapons in hand. But he realized the necessity of a clear road over the passes.

"*Kai*—so be it. Say also this, 'If the khan of the Georgians keeps his sword in its sheath, his arrows in their quivers, we will do likewise."

Unversed in writing and contemptuous of promises that needed to be traced on paper, the Mongol had made his pledge and would abide by it.

"Go, Hugh, show the tablet of command to the *Gurkhan* of the Almalyk bowmen; take two hundred warriors for escort, and mounts with filled saddlebags."

"O Khan," said Hugh, "that is too many, and too few. Quarrels would come between my men and the Georgians. Better to go with two than two hundred."

Subotai glanced keenly into the gray eyes of the Christian, and remembered the warning of Rabban Simeon.

"There is peril upon the road," he growled. "The Georgians may attack thee."

"It may be so."

"If so, the Horde will avenge thee, pursuing thy foes whithersoever they flee and lighting the fire of war that will send its sparks high and far."

Hugh himself had seen the burial of the greatest of the Moslems, who had been foolish enough to put to death Mongol envoys.

"Return then to me, for I have need of thee," added Subotai. "Alone among the men of the Horde thou hast the tongue of the western peoples. *Hai*, thou wilt be the voice of the Horde, even to the Greek emperor in his palace of Chersonese."

The crusader uttered an exclamation and his hands gripped the belt until the stout leather creaked.

"I have loosed thy chains," the Mongol said calmly, "and the road is open to thee. Remember only—we have sworn brotherhood."

"*Kai*, it is so."

When the knight had lifted his hand in leave-taking and had passed from the *yurta*, Subotai summoned a warrior from the shadows behind the fire, a short and stalwart Mongol who walked with a swagger and wore about his forehead the leather band that was the mark of a courier.

"Go, Arslan," Subotai commanded, "with the envoys. Look and listen with the eyes of a ferret and the ears of a fox. The Swooping Hawk speaks plain words; he deals mighty blows. It is said of him that he struck down the Seljuk sultan and defied the emperor of the Greeks. He is a thunderbolt, and I have need of him. Stay at his back, unless he betrays us or harm threatens him. If so, ride hither without dismounting for food or drink."

And then with a word or two for the officers who still drank mare's milk and listened to the drone of a blind minstrel, Subotai Bahadur went to sleep, simply rolling himself up in a corner of the rug, near the fire. Utterly without fear or repentance or uncertainty, he slept quietly—as few commanders of cavalry divisions could have done in hostile country, a thousand miles from their support and base of supplies.

Nor would it have troubled him in the least if he had known the Horde would be on the move sooner than he or any one expected.

KETTLE-DRUMS rolled, and were answered by cymbals in one guard post and another, up the hill. There was snuffling and stirring in the black mass of the horse herds, and here and there thin smoke began to rise against the stars from the openings at the tops of the *yurtas*. A mounted patrol moved wraith-like across the trodden snow, with only a creaking of stirrup leathers.

It was the dawn hour.

But in the Horde was no stirring-forth to prayer, as with Moslems, no chattering and quarreling of varlets and cooks and serving knaves as in a Christian camp. A faint lowing of oxen and grunting of camels. That was all.

Sir Hugh of Taranto stepped from his small tent, drawing tight the buckle of his belt, glanced at the stars in the north and greeted the two riders and the stocky, fur-wrapped courier who held the rein of his gray war-horse.

"*Ahatou noyon!* Hail, chieftains!"

The two mounted Mongols lifted their hands, sparing of speech. Mist of the horses' breathing was in the air, and the crusader's charger neighed as he swung into the saddle.

"A good sign, *bahadur*," cried Arslan, the dispatch rider, running to his own pony.

"Good!" echoed one of the chieftains.

Hugh picked up his reins and glanced a last time at the familiar outlines of the encampment of the conquerors who had come over the earth from Cathay, at the towering poles of standards topped by horns and by drooping horse and yak tails, at the passing patrol, and the black domes visible under the gray streak of the eastern sky, by the frozen river as far as the eye could reach.

Somewhere at the end of that vast plain rode Genghis Khan and the heart of the Horde—dominant, merciless and fearless.

Hung about his throat by a silver chain, Hugh the crusader bore the tablet of command of the *Kha Khan*. In mute evidence thereof the two chieftains had come first to his tent. His was the leadership of the embassy.

Sir Hugh of Taranto adjusted the heavy sword at his side, and clasped steel-mittened hands on his saddle horn.

"Fair Lord Jesus," he whispered, "Thou knowest I bear a pagan talisman of power, and my word is passed to the lord of these men. The road before me is dark. Guide Thou my arm!"

Then he settled his helm on his head and turned to the three silent figures behind him.

"Forward, ye men of the East!"

The gray charger tossed his muzzle at a touch on the rein, and surged ahead, scattering mud and snow with broad hoofs. The three fell in behind, galloping toward the dark rampart of mountains still invisible in the mist.

CHAPTER III

THE ROAD OF THE WARRIORS

EVEN Arslan, who liked to gossip about omens, was silent as they climbed above the mist and crossed the last open ridges. At first a few

venturesome beeches and thorn thickets appeared, and then the gaunt sentinels of the higher timber—young oak and hornbeam, followed by the mass of blue fir and towering deodar, interlaced with the dark stems of giant creepers, and broken here and there by the fall of a monster, now buried under a mound of snow.

Squirrels chattered and barked at them, unseen, and somewhere the wind sighed in the forest mesh. A cluster of wild boar broke across the road, grunting and plowing through the drifts.

"*Ail*" cried Arslan, "there be no watchers here—only beasts."

But the Khan of Almalyk, a handsome man, with the thin nose and square chin of an eastern Turk, slapped the curved saber at his hip and pointed to the side of the road.

A rough cross-piece of wood projected from a mound and beside it other objects peered out of the snow—a miniature shield, a tiny wooden horse. Arslan bent down to look at it.

"A grave. They have given him a shield to bear and a horse to ride in the world of the dead."

The crusader held up his hand for silence. Sounds carried far in that frosty air, and above the monotone of the wind he had heard the tinkle of a silver bell, or so it seemed. But when he had listened he knew that it was a woman's song.

The three others—their ears were keen—heard, and looked at him inquiringly. It was Hugh's task to lead them; theirs to follow. And the crusader had no wish to leave an outpost behind him when he climbed toward Nakha.

So he reined his gray stallion past the grave and bent his helmed head under the laden branches of the evergreens. When the wind blew toward him he caught the note of the song more clearly, and with it a whiff of damp wood smoke. The words of the song he could not understand, but it was swift as the rush of a brook under ice.

Arslan muttered something about the *tengri*, the spirits of high and distant places that rode from peak to peak on the wind. Presently the song ended abruptly and the crusader reined his charger into a trot. The Mongol horses moved silently as ghosts over the forest bed, but the big gray trampled down hidden branches and Hugh knew the mountain folk were not to be taken by surprize. He trotted into a grove of giant deodars where smoke curled up through patches of sunlight.

A score of men, springing up around the fire, were running toward him, drawing knives and axes and poising short javelins.

"Weapons in sheath," he cautioned the Mongols, who had drawn up beside him, and called out in Arabic—

"Ho—the leader of this pack!"

"*Hail*" answered the twenty promptly, and a spear whistled past his ear. They seemed to be hunters, stalwart fellows in bear-skin *burkas* and ragged leg-wrapping; but among them gleamed bronze helmets and a shield or two. They came forward snarling like wolves and with no hesitation at all.

Hugh singled out the best armed of the lot, a handsome giant with the straight nose of a Greek and the deep, piercing eyes of a mountain-bred, a man whose close-cropped head bore no helmet, but whose long limbs were clad in full Turkish mail covered with a white linen cloak embroidered with tiny crosses.

"Back," he cried, "if you would live!"

The tall warrior only growled and made at Hugh, when a cry, a single word clear-pitched as the note of a silver bell halted all twenty in their tracks. Hugh looked past them and saw a woman perched on the shaft of an up-tilted cart—the woman whose song had been arrested by his coming.

"Hail, pagan Lord!" Her fresh young voice greeted him in liquid Arabic. "Yield thee, and thy men! Cast down that great sword!"

"*Yah bint*—" responded the knight. "O girl—"

The singer stamped a slender booted foot upon the wagon shaft.

"O boy, these men obey me, and if

you do not, they will roll your golden hair in the snow."

To gain a clearer sight of him she stood up on the shaft, swaying, a guitar poised against her hip. Over slim shoulders fell gleaming brown hair, unbound, and her eyes were surely blue.

"*Tzigan,*" whispered Arslan who understood Arabic, and knew most of the by-ways of Asia. Had he not carried the post to Kambalu? "Gipsy."

So much was apparent from the red velvet vest close-bound over her breast, the white buckram skirt that came no lower than her knees, and the soft ornate morocco boots.

"Aye so," she nodded, admiring the knight's gray stallion. Then she sprang down from the wagon and pushed through the men, who objected instantly and noisily, until she stood at Hugh's stirrup and searched his face with keen eyes. "Am I not queen of my people? Dismount, if you would speak to me."

Weapons were lowered and Arslan ceased to look like a cat watching a ferret's hole. The mountaineers had seen that the three warriors were followed by no more.

"*Bayadere,*" said the crusader calmly, "O singing girl, do you always set upon envoys like dogs in an alley?"

"Envoys?" she caught at the word, and glanced at the skin-and lacquer-clad Mongols scornfully. "Whence and whither?"

"From the chieftain of yonder Horde."

"By what token?"

Smiling at her insistence, the crusader drew the falcon tablet from the breast of his fur surtout.

"A-ah!" She drew nearer to ponder it. "That is a strange thing. What says the writing?"

The Khan of Almalyk, who was a veteran of the Horde, an Uighur and something of a scholar, had explained this to the crusader.

" 'By the strength of Heaven, whoso fails to render instant obedience to the bearer shall be slain!' " *

*The actual wording of the *paizah*, or tablet of command, given to officers of Genghis Khan.

To Hugh's surprize the singing girl flushed, though her eyes still lingered on his face—eyes that were puzzled and more than angry. And she spoke quietly:

"That is a poor jest. Though a pagan, I had thought you a lord of Cathay."

A smile touched the wide lips of the crusader.

"Not one or the other am I."

"What message bear you—if you are an envoy?"

"*Bayadere,* the message is for the king of the Georgians, and to him will I render it when I have reached his court." Hugh motioned toward the warrior in Turkish mail. "Ask him if he will lead the way."

The singing girl considered a moment, and addressed her followers in a swift rush of words that might have been so many sparks, to stir their restlessness. They thronged around her, arms and voices uplifted, until she silenced them by walking to the fire and beckoning Hugh.

"My Lord Ambassador," she said, "I have told my men that you have yielded captive to us. And still Rupen—" she nodded at the giant— "has sworn that he will cut you to your knees, for that you spoke to me from the saddle. Do not anger him again, and be thankful that he can not understand your words."

Hugh swung down from the stirrup beside the man called Rupen, and there was not an inch of height to choose between them. The crop-headed mountaineer glared at him, fingering his wide leather girdle from which hung a short ax and a curved *yataghan.*

"No quarrel seek I," said the crusader. "In this I serve another. But warn your wolf pack, girl, to keep their distance from my men or they will have wounds to lick."

"Rupen is no guide for you," responded the Tzigan. "I have sent for Shotha Kupri, a Georgian prince. Abide here until his coming, for the shepherds and the villagers would not suffer three pagans to pass far up the road."

Remembering his first visit, Hugh could well believe this, and he advised the Mongols to dismount and sit by him at

the fire. The singing girl vanished into the forest, but Arslan came to gossip.

"*Noyon*," quoth he, "it is true that some of this band are like to horse-lifting Gipsies; it is also true that others wear costly mail and are armed with heavy weapons. Look! Here are huts and a cart, but where are horses, goats, brats, crones and dogs? *Ekh!* It is too clean, this place."

Hugh had noticed that the man Rupen assuredly was no Gipsy. He sat on a log near at hand and glowered, tapping the iron-braced shaft of his ax whenever he thought he was noticed. But when the sun left the grove and the air grew chill he ordered the fire stirred up, and brought to the four envoys bowls of broth and bread with an air of remembering that dogs need not go hungry.

Darkness closed in on the band, and Hugh sat in thought, pondering the task before him—the lack of a written message, the ignorance of the men of the Khaukesh as to the Mongols and the difficulty of conversing in Arabic. When he looked up, the girl of the red boots was kneeling beside him.

"I have brought you hot spiced wine from the village," she said, lifting a jar and pouring steaming liquid into a great copper bowl. "After the saddle, a cup."

Hugh raised the bowl in both hands and uttered a deep-throated "Hail!" And he pretended not to notice that two of the Gipsies came and squatted behind him in the shadows. He did not think he would be attacked before the coming of the other Georgians, and in any case Arslan, who seemed to be dozing in the wagon, was watching what went on at his back. In the Khaukesh, he meditated, anything was better than to show fear.

"Your servant," remarked the Tzigan, "says you are called the Swooping Hawk. Why do you wear your hair long? It is more beautiful than mine!"

Gravely the eyes of the crusader dwelt on her, the first woman he had seen unveiled in many years, since he had turned his back upon Constantinople to fight his way to Jerusalem.

"God gave you beauty," he said.

"And a voice," she assented, shaking back the dark mass of loose hair, "that makes the warriors draw silver and gold coins from their wallets. *Akh*, but it is dull when snow closes the roads."

"The way to Tphilis is open."

She glanced at him fleetingly.

"Why go to Tphilis? Many go and few ride back."

"Is it not the city of the Khaukesh?"

"Aye—of the mountains. But it is *our* city, and pagans and infidels find no welcome."

"How long is the way?"

"For a Gipsy, a day and a night and a day. But a stranger will find his grave more easily than our city." And, as Rupen had done, she touched the ivory hilt of a slender knife in her girdle and nodded emphatically. "You are not like the other Mongols. Why do they call you the Swooping Hawk?"

"That is my name—Hugh.*"

She repeated the name and it seemed to puzzle her.

"Nay, once I saw a lion in Sarai. It was big and sleepy. You are like that lion. But it is foolish to go toward Tphilis. It would be much better to tell me your message, and I would send it swiftly. The winds bear *my* messages." And, chin on hand, she chuckled at him, like a child with a delightful secret. "Do the Mongols bring war or peace?" she asked idly.

"Your king shall hear."

"You are as stupid as the lion, that only roused when it was hungry or angry. The Ermeni merchants say the Mongols are evil spirits who see in the dark and ride their horses through the air; the dogs of Persians say the Horde is a scourge sent by God. I think all that is a lie."

"Neither angels nor demons are they."

"Perhaps they are magicians. Do they seek cattle or tribute?"

Hugh laughed under his breath.

**Hui-hui* was the name in Cathay of a strange people in the west. The sound signifies perhaps the beating wings of a bird of prey. It is written sometimes *Uighur*, and translated as the Swooping Hawks.

"*Bayadere*, come to Tphilis and you shall hear."

"*Akh*, you will grieve that you did not tell me."

"What manner of man is your king?"

The singing girl smiled at him suddenly.

"Come to Tphilis and you shall know."

Nor would she speak to him again, sitting tranquilly on the bear-skin beside him, head cradled in her fists, her eyes roving from man to man, not so much a Gipsy queen holding her court as a girl child with a plenitude of playmates. And when Shotha Kupri came swinging into the firelight, followed by a line of short and shaggy warriors, her eyes sparkled with anticipation of merriment to come.

"Make the salaam of obedience, O *Thawad*," she called to the grizzled prince, "before this envoy of the mighty Khan. Not to do so is to die. So it is written on the tablet."

The grim Georgian planted his legs before Hugh and breathed heavily.

"By ——, that spy!"

"Nay," cried the girl at once, "he bears a message to the king of the Georgians."

Before Hugh could be more than puzzled by the casual way in which the Gipsy spoke of the reigning monarch, Shotha Kupri growled at him again.

"War or peace?"

The crusader stood up, gripping hands in his belt.

"Prince of these people, will you tell me the armed strength of your bands? The roads by which they cross the mountains?"

"God forbid!"

"Nor will I tell to you the words of the Khan."

The singing girl wriggled with delight at the Georgian's chagrin. But the old warrior was a man of expedients.

"Write it, then, my Lord Envoy."

"In what language?" Hugh could converse in Arabic, but write it he could not, and he suspected that these mountain nobles were not great hands at reading. So it proved. Shotha Kupri frowned and pulled at his mustache.

"What would you?" he asked.

"Go to Tphilis."

"By the Horned One, no pagan spy shall go to our city!"

Hugh shook his tawny head quietly.

"No pagan spy. For ten years I have fought the paynim, under the standard of the Cross."

"*Hai!*" Shotha Kupri raised his shoulders and held out gnarled hands. "You come out of the East, with accursed Mongols at your back; you speak the tongue of the thrice-accursed Arabs. Shall we trust you?"

"And yet," mused the singing girl, glancing from the mighty crusader to the old chieftain, "his hair and eyes be unlike the Muslimin. Nay, his sword is a strange weapon."

"Proof!" demanded Shotha Kupri.

"Who are you, my Lord Hugh?" asked the Tzigan.

Hugh looked around at the circle of bearded faces that hemmed in the three, and seated himself, his sword across his knees.

"I will tell ye, O men of the Khaukesh, as best I may."

It was no easy matter in Arabic eked out with a little Turki that seemed more familiar to the listeners, but Hugh said that beyond the sea that lay at the back of their mountains—they nodded assent to that—there was the Greek empire, and beyond that, toward the setting sun, Frankistan, the land of the Franks. From an island called England he had come, when the warriors had been summoned to free the city of Christ from infidel dominion. The priests had preached a crusade—Shotha Kupri grunted, having heard of this—and the warriors of Frankland had sewn the Cross on their garments and had taken a vow that they would never turn back from their quest of Jerusalem.

He described the mighty camps of the crusaders, their passage to Constantinople in the ships of the Venetians and their betrayal by the Greek emperor. He told of the battle of Antioch where eight hundred of his comrades had given up their lives; how others had been persuaded

to turn their swords against the pagan Slavs and Bulgars, and how he had finally reached Jerusalem alone, a captive of the Arabs.

Years he had dwelt among the black tents of the Bedouins, until he had sought for a way to return to his home, and this quest had led him across the path of the onrushing Mongols, who had saved his life. He had found no road to his home, and in time he had sworn obedience to the khan of the Mongols, who meant to invade the west.

"And then, O ye men of the Khaukesh," he said gravely, "the story came to me that through this valley ran the road that led to the Black Sea and to Constantinople. It was good hearing, and, God willing it, some day I shall see my home again."

Then he faced Shortha Kupri squarely.

"O *Khawand,* the message I bring is the choice between peace and war. I must go to Tphilis."

Hereupon the warriors began to argue among themselves in their harsh voices, and Rupen made no secret of his enmity, while Shotha Kupri seemed dubious, until the singing girl silenced them and answered swiftly and musically, so that Hugh wondered at the quietude that came upon them.

"We have never seen a Frank before," she assured him simply, and added eagerly. "Now I will let you tell me of the wars in all the world, and the lords of men and how they bore themselves in battle, because it is clear to me that you have served long, as you say. And," she shook her dark head sagely, "you are both foolish and arrogant—and such men do not lie."

"The tale is not easy to believe," put in Shotha Kupri. "These men of Cathay are magicians. Perhaps they have altered one of their number to the semb ance of a Christian."

Rupen thrust forward and uttered a curt word, and the old prince smote his thigh.

"True! In Tphilis there are Greeks who will know whether this man lies."

Hugh smiled a little.

"My Lord, have I not said that the Greeks are my sworn enemies?"

"Ha! It will not save you from the test. Come!"

BUT when Hugh left his hut the next morning he found Arslan squatting in the snow holding the reins of his charger in readiness for the road. The good humored little Mongol had spent the remainder of the night with the wine cup among the Georgians.

"*Noyon,*" he whispered, pretending to adjust a girth buckle, "the Tzigan girl is ill-pleased because you go to the city. She scolded all her men, and now she is gone again, taking a swift-footed pony from the *tabun.* She has a whim."

And he shook his dark head soberly, while Hugh suffered the gray stallion to thrust its soft muzzle into his palm.

"Aye, *she* sniffs out secrets," Arslan added. "Her whim is to hear tales of war. Her name is Rusudan, and when she sings these Georgians come and stand guard over her. They are dogs, but they are her dogs."

Hugh peered through the mist and smiled.

"Shortha Kupri is a prince of this realm."

"So are the sheep-herders and the tenders of cattle. They are all her slaves. You can sleep in the saddle beside Shotha Kupri, but watch for the coming of Rusudan, for that will be the hour of the commencement of happenings."

It was a strange country, this of the Khaukesh. They rode that day, thirty Georgians and three envoys and Arslan, past Nakha in the forest and by other villages perched on crags and girdled by rude stone walls. And the men and the dogs of these hamlets streamed down to stare at them, and shout encouragement to the captors, defiance to the Mongols.

But when they reached the summit of the wind-swept pass, Hugh saw that the trail wound down to a broad valley. In the valley the sun gleamed again on the frozen Kur, and when they left the last of

the timber behind them Shotha Kupri led them to two waiting sledges.

Four horses were harnessed to each, and two Georgians sat astride the horses. And here Shotha Kupri bade them leave their own mounts and sit in the sledges. In this way faster time would be made, and the chargers would be spared. So said Shotha Kupri.

But Hugh noticed that he was to ride with the Georgian in the first sledge, Arslan perching behind on the runners. The horses, likewise, were to be taken from them. So he sought out the Khan of Almalyk and the other gaunt and silent Mongol, who had uttered never a word and had roused only at the prospect of a fight in the deodar grove.

"My brothers," he said in their own speech, choosing the words with care, "we go henceforth upon two *kibitkas* without wheels. I say to you: Draw not your weapons, lift not your hands against the Georgians. This is the *yassa*, the order."

"It is the order," nodded the Khan, but the other Mongol looked up the valley, so wide that the ranges on either hand seemed like low hills.

"*Kai!*" he grunted. "The road is wide; there is no barrier. The Horde will race up the valley like a wolf scenting a sick stag."

And, with the indifference of his race, he climbed into the sledge beside Rupen. The veteran Mongol did not think he would come out of the Khaukesh alive, but he would obey the order. If he or the Frank or the Khan of Amalyk were cut down there, there were boys in the Gobi learning to tend herd who would take their places in not so many winters. All that mattered was that the Horde would be able to pass over the road through the mountains.

CHAPTER IV

SNOW

SPEEDING over the gray valley, Sir Hugh pictured to himself an English countryside, and the longed-for sight of a Christian stronghold, with lord and liegemen stretching their legs under laden tables by a roaring fire; tales of hunt and foray well told; the chant of a minstrel; a red-cheeked priest dozing over his ale; and white-skinned women, unveiled, giving zest to the night with their laughter or praise. Loneliness is like a fever, rising suddenly in the veins of a wanderer.

Not for a dozen years had he heard the ring of a Frankish voice. His comrades lay, some in graves, some shattered and forgotten.

Wrapped in his wolf-skins, Hugh smiled, beside the silent Georgian. He himself, most like, was forgotten now by all save the Greek emperor, who had hunted him out of the Holy Land. No wife or children or henchmen in Frankland would remember Hugh who had sewn the Cross on his shoulder when he was a lad in his 'teens.

The wooden runners squeaked over hard snow, and a bitter wind whipped the up-fling of the horses' hoofs into his face. The long twilight had ended, and clouds banked low overhead. Shotha Kupri peered about him and grunted when they changed horses at a village. The wind was rising, and the blackness above seemed to press down on the gray ground.

"Snow," he muttered. "It will not be good, this night."

Nevertheless he gave command to go forward, and the sledge circled down to the frozen bed of the river. Here they were a little sheltered, but even Arslan who had the eyes of a wild-cat, could not guess where the Road of the Warriors might lie. Dry flakes whirled down from the sky, and the manes of the horses whipped out to the left, while the riders turned up the collars of their *burkas* to shelter their faces.

Hugh's feet and hands grew chilled, and when he wrapped the furs more closely around him the warmth made him drowsy. His chin dropped on his chest and he slept.

How long, he did not know. When the sledge stopped in front of the lighted windows of a cabin, he roused and saw that the horses were being changed again.

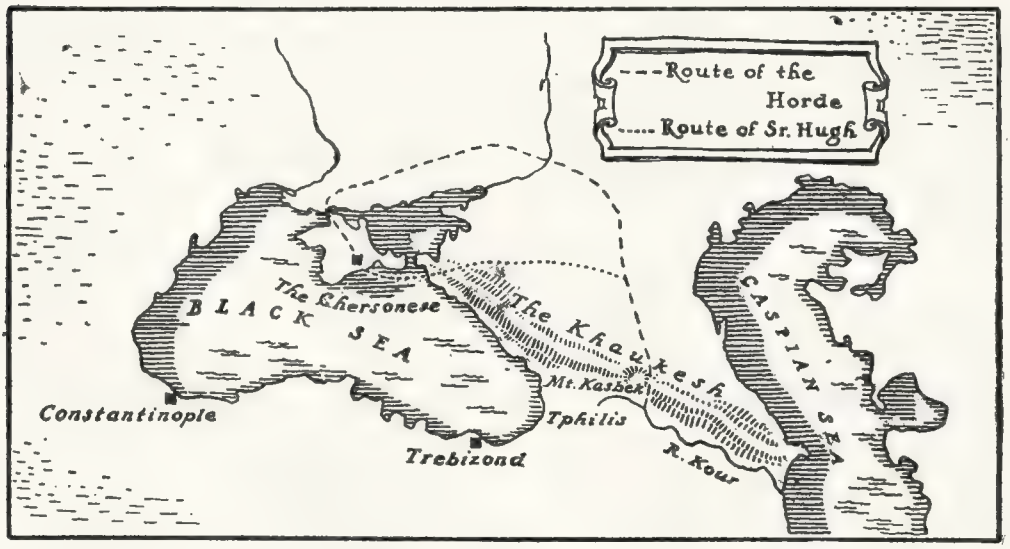
Bells jangled and the Georgian couriers shouted, and before he could ask a question they started off into the wind. White domes that might have been haystacks flitted past, and then the veil of snow hid everything.

It seemed to the crusader that he had more room in the seat than before, and

"*Ai*, your hand is heavy." Rusudan's slender shoulder moved under his fingers and released her. "Are they *my* men?"

Sudden anger rendered the crusader heedless.

"Stop and wait for them or you will know pain."



that the out-riders were different men. Abruptly he turned and looked behind him. Arslan was no longer perched on the runners. And the horses that galloped after the sledge bore armed warriors. Of the other vehicle and the Mongols there was no sign.

Hugh clapped a heavy hand on his companion's shoulder, and then, with an exclamation of surprize, peered into the face hidden under its fur hood. Even in the storm he was conscious of a faint scent of jasmine, and in a moment more he was certain that the eyes looking up into his belonged to Rusudan, the Gipsy.

The horses' manes and tails still tossed to the left, so they were still going forward —unless the wind had changed. The mounted escort seemed to be Georgians and not Gipsies, and he did not think Shotha Kupri would have quitted the sledge unwilling.

"Where are my men?" he asked bluntly.

The dark eyes under the hood searched his face, in the murk of the storm.

"Is this the courtesy of a warrior of the Cross? Your men were kept at the last village. Rupen and his *abreks* have care of them."

Hugh stood up at once, casting off the fur lap-robes, letting in the drift and the wind, and Rusudan who seemed able to read his thoughts half-formed, mocked him.

"Go and seek in the snow! Neither road nor village will you find. Am I to bring spies into Tphilis? Nay, the agreement was that you alone should come."

"If harm comes to them"—Hugh thought of Subotai and the Horde that was beginning to weary of eating and sleeping.

"You will be alone. Are you afraid? Fear is no friend in the Khaukesh."

Hugh swore roundly under his breath,

by good Saint George and the Archangel Michael.

"Then sit down," quoth Rusudan, pulling at the robes. "You are letting in the snow, and my men will think you are afraid."

Hugh resumed his seat and pulled the robe over the girl who was shivering under the bite of the wind.

"Hath all the Khaukesh," he asked grimly, "sworn fealty to Rusudan?"

"To Rusudan. Is not every Georgian and Tcherkessian a Gipsy at heart. From the Gate to Tcharnomor* they bend their foreheads to my feet."

"Even Shotha Kupri?"

"The *thawad* is my lover. And Prince Rupen—both of them."

"And they also, who ride behind us?"

Rusudan gasped, and then chuckled.

"O stupid lion of the Nazarenes—they also, all twenty." And she lifted her clear voice in a call, as a huntress might urge on the dog pack. At once a gruff shout came back to them against the wind. "O lion that sleeps and growls! Not Hugh but Gurgaslan the Tawny One should be thy name. Why did the Mongol chieftain choose you for envoy?"

"Because I can speak with the people of these mountains and the Greeks beyond, if there be need," said the crusader simply.

"Why do you always speak the truth?"

A gust that swooped down from ice gorges fifty miles away buffeted them and drove the dry snow into throats and sleeves, and touched their bodies with utter cold. Hugh knew that it was true that he could not find a village or even keep to the road if he left the sledge.

When he could draw a free breath again he laughed.

"Such is the *yassa*, the law of Genghis Khan—"

"Who is he?"

"The most terrible of emperors, who hath conquered half the world. Aye, the master of the Horde."

Rusudan found food for thought in this and asked an unexpected question—

"Is Genghis Khan with the Horde down in the lower valley?"

"Nay. Perhaps in Samarkand, or Ind or Cathay—who knows?"

"But you are a knight of the Cross!"

"Aye."

"And what is the *yassa* of Christiandom, among the Franks? Do they also speak the truth always?"

"Not always, little Rusudan."

Hugh laughed again and explained as if to an inquisitive child the vows that must be taken by a youth of western Europe before he could wear the belt and the gold spurs. And Rusudan, throwing her wide sleeve before her eyes, bent closer to the crusader, trying to read his face in the whirling white drift.

"*Akh*," she made response, her mood changing as swiftly as the gusts of the storm, "to serve God in all things—that is good. And to render fealty to thy lord. But for the rest, to draw weapon for the weak in a quarrel or to utter only what is truth—one who did *that* would not live long here—" she swept her arm across the outer darkness—"here, amid Ermeni and Irani and the Roumis."†

And she added thoughtfully:

"A camel must choose his own gait, and a lion his own path. But can a panther cease from snarling? This is surely true. I am taking you to Tphilis, but first to the king of the Georgians."

Though the sledge lurched and creaked, and the horsemen went forward to search for the road they had lost, and all the devils of the storm screamed at them, Rusudan seemed pleased with events.

She sang under her breath in time with the jingling of the harness bells, until the ceaseless pelter of snow made her drowsy and she cuddled back in the fur robes, leaving the crusader to his own thoughts.

And Hugh wondered how little else she had told him that was true, and why she had taken Shotha Kupri's place. Bending over her to adjust the robe about her, he was aware again of the flower-scent of jasmine, more delicate than musk. Under long lashes deep in the shadow of the

* The Black Sea.

† Armenians and Persians and the Greeks.

hood, eyes both eager and curious searched his face.

RUSUDAN was as good as her word. Late the next afternoon when the storm had drifted away over other ranges, they left the Road of the Warriors with its strings of long-haired camels, its bands of Circassians and wild Alans—all heading west and all truculent and quarrelsome, until they heard Rusudan's voice—and turned away from the river into a grove of evergreens.

When the out-riders dismounted, the singing girl left the sledge and motioned for Hugh to come with her.

Sword in hand, he walked beside her to a stone church hidden in the grove—a strange little church, for all it bore a cross carved above the arched entrance—with a round tower and only narrow embrasures for windows.

"Nay," said Rusudan, "we of the Khaukesh follow Christ, as our fathers have done. See, the chapel is like to a guarded tower. Have we not defended our faith and our churches with the sword?"

Hugh looked up at the emblem chiseled in stone, worn with age and strange in form, and his eyes lighted.

"Surely this is the door of Christiandom!"

"Aye, the gate. They call us Malakites and heretics, but we give veneration to the Patriarch. Come!"

Rusudan pushed open the iron-barred door and closed it after them. The gray light of the winter afternoon hardly penetrated the narrow openings, but under the vault of the tower a huge candle gleamed and toward it the girl made her way, taking the crusader's hand to guide him.

The wall at the base of the tower was a pattern of tile and mosaic, brightened with holy pictures in their gilded frames. Rusudan paused beside a granite slab, and the knight, bending forward, saw that a helmet and shield and sword lay upon the stone. There was gold inlay on the steel casque, and the blade of the curved sword was clean and bright.

"I take care of them," Rusudan whispered. "I come here more often than to the great Malaki by the palace. This is the tomb of George Lasha, my brother."

Hugh bent his head.

"May God give rest to him. In life he bore good weapons."

The girl tossed back the dark mane of her hair and smiled proudly.

"His foes knew his anger. Dear Christ, he was young, that he should be laid under the earth!"

Hugh understood vaguely that this girl of the mountains, who sang before the warriors and pried into secrets, could not be old. At times he though her a child of sixteen, escaped from the embroidery frame and the teachings of a priest; and again he told himself she must be a woman of mature years.

"Upon the road, Hugh," she said gravely, "you did not trust my words. *Akh*, now you must talk with others. But tonight you will see my scarlet *kontash* and silver fillet. My brother was king of all the clans, scion of Karthlos, first among all the Georgians."

"He was king!" The crusader stepped back a pace, and his brow knit in thought. "And who now holds the throne?"

"Ivan—John the Constable is Protector. He is the leader of the army. I have no other brother and I am too young to sit in the throne of Tphilis."

Many things came into Hugh's mind: the girl's escort that had made such a fierce stand when the Mongols appeared; the anxiety of Shotha Kupri; the respect that greeted her upon the road.

"They call me," went on Rusudan, who had an uncanny knack of guessing his thoughts, "a Gipsy forsooth. Because I go to the hunts and like the saddle better than a carriage and—because of many things."

She sighed, as if there were many pleasant things that a sister of the king might not do.

"I was visiting Prince Shotha's family," she went on, "at his castle on the Kur, when a shepherd brought tidings of the

Mongols and their great camp. We were hunting boar that week through the Nakha forest and I begged old Shotha to let me go to the outer camp where some of his men watched the doings of your Horde. He would not consent, but I begged. At last he agreed, if I would not make it known in Tphilis. John the Constable is a harsh man, and he would not forgive old Shotha that I had been near peril. O good Saint Demetrius, Rupen and Shotha were wild when you came out of the forest!"

And she laughed so gleefully at the memory that Hugh laughed with her. In truth, he had come with scant ceremony before this child of a ruling family.

"*Akh!*" she cried, her mood changing. "Rupen has sworn he will challenge you to edged weapons and stretch you on the ground. It would be a sin to slay an envoy, and I told him that you were under my protection."

"If he seeks me," put in Hugh bluntly, "it is not my wish to claim protection. Tell him so."

Rusudan's small lips puckered.

"*Ei*, I do not want either of you killed. Men are like stupid old boars that tear one another and do not care what happens to all the rest."

"*Khatun*," the crusader asked gravely, "Princess, why did you take Shotha Kupri's place in the sledge?"

"Why? The road was not safe for you. Shotha Kupri has feuds with other clans; even a Tcherkessian would not lift hand against me."

"For thy favor I thank thee."

"And now tell me the message of the khan. I wish to know."

Hugh considered, frowning.

"I crave thy pardon, Princess Rusudan. I may not tell it, save to the ruler of the Georgians, and he, by thy tale, is one John the Constable."

Rusudan's blue eyes flashed.

"O fool—thrice fool that thou art! Tall, bearded simpleton! At first thy bold bearing and great sword made me think thee a paladin, a wise and courteous lord —thy coming an omen—" she stopped abruptly, with a grimace. "Do you *still* think I am lying to you?"

"Saint George!" cried the knight with utter sincerity. "Not so!"

"Then," went on the girl quietly, "come to the audience this night and deliver thy message to Ivan and the *comptor* and the *strategos*."

Hugh sought for words, feeling as if he had plunged in full career against an array of mailed riders. Before he could speak, Rusudan had turned away from him and was kneeling before the candle, her hands clasped against her breast, her lips moving in prayer. From the wall strange saints looked down at her with expressionless eyes.

When she had finished the prayer, Rusudan drew the fur hood over her head and went to the door; nor did she again offer her hand to guide the crusader.

"I believed *thy* tale, when others did not," she said, when he strode to her side. "Now I go to Tphilis. Thy road is clear —to the west, to Constantinople and thy home, once thy message is delivered. Wait, and one will come to guide you."

When he had opened the door and would have followed her out to the sledge, she motioned for him to remain in the chapel. The waiting Georgians closed around her, and were lost to sight in the gray twilight among the firs.

Standing in the door, leaning on the broad hand-guard of his sword Durandal, the crusader waited, until a spluttering torch came into view down another path and disclosed a single warrior leading toward him a white charger, ready saddled.

CHAPTER V

THE MESSAGE

HUGH followed the man toward Tphilis. The torch made deeper the night mist, and his guide was silent as the chapel of the ikons wherein lay the body of the late king. They halted at a wall of gray stone until a postern door opened and bearded spearmen peered at them curiously; then they plunged into

alleys where lights bobbed forth and disappeared, and the smells were of mastic and charcoal and steaming rice. Below them somewhere a river swirled and roared and ice crackled.

The night was full of sound and half-seen shapes—a queer little priest with a full beard and rosy cheeks and a veil that fell from his sugar-loaf hat to his plump shoulders; a bold-eyed Jew clutching his shuba about him with one hand and dragging a laden donkey with the other.

All the men who thronged the narrow streets bore weapons, and all ceased talking to stare after the crusader with his heavy sword. Then they crowded past the stalls of merchants—Armenians selling embroidery beside hawk-nosed Moslems of Daghestan who sat among curved *kindhjals* and gleaming *yataghans*, and leather, tasseled shields.

And the snatches of talk that reached his ears seemed the very gossip of Babel, harsh Arabic mingling with plaintive Persian, and an oath compounded of all the saints in the Greek calendar. His guide turned aside from the alleys and plunged up into deeper mist. The tumult of the river and restless men subsided, and Hugh could hear distant church bells chiming slowly.

He saw that the road they ascended was hewn out of sheer rock, and full of turnings. He guessed it was the ramp of a castle, before they reached a stone gate and passed under the jaws of the lifted portcullis. In the half darkness of an outer courtyard the guide laid hand on the charger's rein.

Hugh listened to the steady tramp of men-at-arms along the parapet over his head and he drew a long breath of satisfaction. After twelve years of wandering he stood at last within the walls of Christian folk.

A young Georgian emerged from a door with a serving knave bearing a lanthorn, and the crusader was led through the halls of the donjon to a chamber where a fire glowed on the hearth and the Georgian esquire-at-arms brought him food and wine and a silver basin of water.

"The mighty lord," he said in barbaric Greek, "awaits you. Eat, therefore, and robe yourself."

Hugh satisfied a huge hunger, but change his apparel he could not, lacking other garments than the ones he stood in, and the eyes of the Georgian widened when he rose in his worn steel hauberk and stained leather gambeson and wet leg-wrappings. Even the steel of the light helm he carried on his arm was dark with oil and weathering, and had more than one dent in it.

"Lead, youth," quoth Hugh, picking up the sword Durandal in its stained leather scabbard with his free hand, "to this mighty lord."

IN THE hall of the donjon a hundred pairs of eyes paid tribute to the fairness of Rusudan, child of the race of Karthlos, Keeper of the Gate.

Armenian elders, Georgian *thawads* and *aznaurs*, Circassian and Avar chieftains from the higher ranges, and the many vassals of Ivan, whose family ruled the domain about Tphilis—all these were standing in the rushes of the lower hall. The upper end of the hall was raised, and covered with rich carpets. Oil-lamps flared and smoked in their niches in the wall that was adorned to the rafters with weapons and heads of boar and stag.

The long table had been cleared of food, and the three men who sat in converse, glancing from time to time at the entrance, were sipping wine from silver goblets. The central figure was Ivan, or John the Constable, Protector of Georgia, who alone of the three wore mail.

Small of stature, he sat erect, seldom moving hand or head. A cloak of good gray homespun was cast over his chair, and the weapon-bearer behind him held a short, black ax, heavy and whetted to a keen edge. Like the ax, the face of the constable was broad and heavy and unchanging—a curling jaw, a beak of a nose and grizzled hair close-clipped. A daring man and obstinate.

"The envoy of the Khan!"

So cried the young squire, stepping into

the hall. The uproar of talk died away to a murmur. At one end of the table an aged Katholicos in black robe and glittering cope set down his goblet of wine and stroked his beard.

Opposite the priest, Rusudan turned her head to look down the hall. Troubled and anxious she might be, but gave no outward sign of it as she sat, her high-backed chair raised a little above the others, her clasped hands hidden in long embroidered sleeves of whitest linen, a scarlet over-robe hanging from her thin shoulders, the mass of her brown hair penned by a silver fillet studded with square turquoise. Against her breast was the weight of a great emerald, cut in the form of a shield. Silent she must be, for Ivan's was the power, but in the admiring eyes of the Khaukesh chieftain she was the child of their king and the seal of their loyalty.

At Hugh they stared angrily as he advanced to the steps of the upper hall and bent his head to John the Constable, who acknowledged the salute curtly.

An Italian at the left of the protector rose and greeted the crusader courteously.

"Ivan of Georgia bids me welcome you to Tphilis, Sir Envoy."

Hugh saw that this was a Genoese, punctilious in finest linen and velvets, his dark curls oiled, his eyes shrewd—a man who would take much and give little, but master of all the amenities of life. Since the other addressed him in the *lingua franca* that was the common speech of the crusaders, it must be known in Tphilis that he was a Frank, serving the Mongols.

"To John the Constable," said Hugh at once, "I bear greeting from Subotai Bahadur, marshal of Genghis Khan."

When the Italian, who was called della Trevisani, had translated this, Hugh was bidden to come to the table, where he stood facing the constable.

"It is passing strange," observed the Genoese, "that a Frankish knight should find service in the pagan Horde."

To this Hugh made no answer.

"And where," went on Trevisani, "is the warranty of your mission?"

Hugh touched the falcon tablet at his throat, and the constable looked at him curiously.

"The protector," Trevisani hastened to explain, "is pleased to say you have the seeming of a potent warrior—a noble who hath seen service in war."

The crusader inclined his head, and John the Constable spoke again.

"Where is the message of the Mongol?" the Genoese interpreted. "Is it written in Arabic?"

"It is not written. It was said to me."

"Ha! And what?"

Trevisani bent over the table eagerly, and the throng of chieftains, sensing happenings, crowded closer.

Hugh faced the Lord of Tphilis.

"Thus says Subotai Bahadur: 'Our horses are swift, our arrows sharp and our hearts hard as yonder mountains. It is ours to command; the Georgians', to obey. Let them not molest us when we pass over the roads of their kingdom.' "

When he had done, Trevisani started, and hesitated before translating. When he had rendered the message in harsh Georgian, the swarthy face of John the Constable grew dark, and he snatched at the ax in the hand of his weapon-bearer.

"Was that all?" the Genoese asked.

Hugh glanced at Rusudan who was sitting bolt upright, her cheeks the hue of the scarlet robe.

"Subotai pledges this," he answered quietly. "If the Georgians will swear a peace and keep it, the Mongols will do likewise."

"Has he written *that?*"

"He can not write," Hugh explained impatiently, "nor can any of the Horde, except the captive, Rabban Simeon. But he will not violate his pledged word."

The Georgians who had been muttering behind the crusader now rushed up to the table, clutching sword hilts and roaring their rage, while John the Constable crashed the flat of his ax upon the table and set all the goblets to dancing. The patriarch raised a quivering hand and seemed to bless the tumult, while

Rusudan twisted her fingers in her white sleeves, her eyes shining.

It was John the Constable who thrust back the unruly nobles and stepped to Hugh's side.

"Bold are you," the modulated voice of the Genoese translated the grim words, "to bear such defiance to Tphilis. Harken, now, to the answer."

The tumult quieted while warriors and serving knaves alike held their breaths to listen. The constable signed to the third man at the table and together they went to stand at Rusudan's chair and talk, low-voiced. Hugh uttered an exclamation when he looked more closely at John's companion.

The Georgians around him nudged one another, and a bearded Circassian whispered to his neighbor—

"*Daroga Padishah.*"

The officer of the emperor! Hugh had heard there were Greeks at Tphilis, and surely this was one of high rank. So much he knew by the man's white cloak edged with scarlet, by his leggings bound with gold cord and the jeweled medals that gleamed on his chest. Rusudan spoke to the twain, but her glance went over the throng and rested on Hugh defiantly.

She lifted her head and cried one word, and the hall rang with the approval of her chieftains. Fifty swords were snatched forth and raised overhead, and the warders at the door, taking heart from the sight, began to clash their axes against their shields. Rusudan stood up, and the Georgians cried her name until she stretched out her hands to them, tears in her eyes.

"Thus," observed della Trevisani at Hugh's ear, "is the pagan Khan answered. You will perceive, my Frank, that it means war."

Rusudan summoned her women and swept from the hall, and at every step the warriors cheered her. Though Hugh watched the girl's every motion, she ignored his presence, and shrewd Trevisani saw the knight's lips tighten.

"Ha, my Frank, a firebrand, that royal child. The constable makes the decision, but it is for Rusudan that these mountaineers would willingly be hewn in pieces—or boiled and salted down, for that matter."

Meanwhile the constable approached the envoy.

"No need of delay," he said curtly. "If the Mongol ventures into the Kaukesh he will be driven out by Georgian swords."

Hugh lifted his hand.

"My Lord," he responded slowly, "God give you fortune of your choice. You have spoken bravely—and heedlessly."

"Rusudan hath spoken, and the *thawads* and *azaurs*, the princes and nobles, have echoed her choice. Messer Frank, you will bear our answer hence on the morrow."

Hugh had been brought to Tphilis in a heavy mist at evening, and would doubtless be led away before he could have a fair sight of the stronghold that was the gate of Europe.

"Lord Prince," he said bluntly, "men say you are wise in battle. The Horde is not like other foes. Is the answer yours—or a young girl's, echoed by her henchmen?"

The broad chin of John the Constable thrust out and his powerful hands gripped the ax.

"By the tomb of Tamar—it is mine! What would you, Frank?"

"This! I have seen the host of the caliphs melt away before the onset of the Horde. Take thought, my Lord Constable, for your villages and the lives that are in your charge."

"Now, by all the saints!" John the Constable laughed harshly. "Doth a warrior of Frankland cry truce?"

"Aye, so." Hugh folded his long arms on the handguard of Durandal and looked into the faces that pressed close to him—like his own, bearded and scarred and weather-worn. "Messers, many days have I spent in the Horde. And I know there is a mighty power in the Mongol onset. They reck not of death, nor do they yield them captive. They seek no war

with ye, but mean to find a way through the Khaukesh. I say to ye, wait—for two days or three—and do not answer out of hand."

When this was interpreted by the Genoese, the men of Tphilis murmured anew.

"Truce with pagans is not to be thought upon!"

"A renegade! Look that he play not the part of a spy."

"'Tis said he was a warrior of the Cross. He bears no sign upon him—no device upon shield or shoulder."

But the regent of Georgia smote the flat of his battle-ax against the table.

"Ho, in three days shall the Khan be answered fittingly! And you, Sir Conscience-Keeper, will know our mind."

IN A corner tower of the donjon Trevisani and the Greek burned low their candles, sitting late over a board of chess, until their servitors dozed by the door.

The eyes of the Genoese played restlessly over the miniature warriors of ivory and ebony, wandered to the curtains of the door, to the flickering candles and swept ever and anon over the dark and lean countenance of Choaspes the strategos, the general of the eternal emperor. Choaspes was *strategos* of the Khaukesh region, the eastern frontier of the Greek empire. And the edge of his white silk cloak was dyed so deep a scarlet that it looked more like the imperial and forbidden purple.

"Your high Excellency," observed Trevisani, pushing forward one of the tiny horsemen that were the pawns, "is listless this night."

"By the wreath and the belly of Bacchus," murmured the Greek, "I am colder than a Hyrcanian tiger, if ever there were such a beast."

He drew a sable wrap over his shapely shoulders and cursed the brazier that gave out, as he truthfully said, more smoke than smell, and more smell than heat.

"To think, Messer Antonio, that my galley is laid up at the Golden Chersonese, with fat Philipo killing flies and drinking my best Cyprian, his only worry the price of slave girls at Tanais and the vagaries of the dice box. He always was unlucky, but now he hath all the best of it."

Choaspes had the full throat, the curling lips and the level eyes of a Greek, but the ruddy color under his swarthy skin bespoke Persian blood. He was rather proud of his slender hands, which were adorned with rings of matched opals set in gold.

"The Chersonese," he sighed, "would be gay just now with the new year's feasts, and I hear the emperor is there to take the mud baths."

"The health of his eternal Magnificence is not of the best?"

"By Hercules, no!"

"Ah, but is not your Excellency's illustrious family the Comneni, who are the bulwark of elder Rome and the empire itself in Asia? If a successor to Theodore Lascaris—may he live for ten thousand years!—is to be chosen—"

"It will be in the Chersonese, my dear Messer Antonio, where no doubt the very knowing princes are this minute—" he smiled at the merchant—"attending the sick man. A bulwark, Messer Antonio—and I felicitate you upon the apt simile—is never crowned. Only the pillars of the palace are given capitals, whatever their pedestals may be."

"And still, your Excellency will reflect that a bulwark is venerated, when it stems a flood."

"Of course. Theodore Lascaris sits on the throne of the Cæsars because he cut to pieces an army of Seljuk Turks a dozen years ago."

Antonio della Trevisani surveyed the slumbering servitors and smiled.

"At Antioch? I seem to remember that some hundreds of Frankish crusaders won that victory for the eternal emperor. None of them lived to tell of it."

Choaspes' glittering hand moved over the board and shifted his king from an ebony to an ivory square safe from the attack of the Genoese' bishop.

"*Ehu!* One lived, but not to tell of it.

We sought him and hunted, and a Syrian traced him as far as Jerusalem. There was a price of five thousand *bezants* on his head, but even the Jews never unearthed him. Crowned a martyr, no doubt, in the Holy City where the Moslem fellows who blotted him out never got a *dinar* for their pains."

"Why the price on his head?" Trevisani was interested.

Choaspes fingered the goblet at his elbow and sipped a little wine.

"Eh, we are exiles here among the *barbaros*, you and I, Messer Antonio. Boon companions, you might say. Still, though a dozen years have passed—" he smiled—"let us say that his most compassionate Majesty desired to reward this solitary Frank fittingly, this young Norman, who was, as I remember, most wayward and daring as an offspring of Mars and Diana—assuming that Diana ever had offspring."

"Five thousand *bezants*," quoth Messer Antonio, fingering his lip, and not perceiving that the Greek had led the talk skillfully from his own political ambitions and the possible death of the emperor. "A goodly sum—"

"That was never paid."

"A foolhardy youth. Well, the Frank who has found sanctuary in the Mongol Horde is quite the opposite—stoic and cautious."

"Too stupid to lie and too stubborn to keep silence. The other ventured rashly against the Seljuks with his eight hundred barbarians, whereby all but he, the leader, left their bodies on the field."

Choaspes knew well enough that the eight hundred crusaders had died because Theodore Lascaris, the Greek emperor, had sacrificed them; but he did not intend to admit as much to the merchant.

"A bold man is usually honest," commented the Genoese, who was a judge of character, as all money-lenders must be. "What does your Excellency think of his warning?"

"Ask the Sibyl—ask the astrologers. These Georgian mountaineers are barbarians; the Mongols, savages."

"And horsemen. Is it not true that cavalry can not maneuver in mountain passes?"

"True, Messer Antonio." Choaspes laughed and sipped again of his wine. "At least, if I am denied the solace of the Golden Chersonese I shall be amused by the coming battle."

Trevisani breathed an inaudible sigh of relief. Though the *strategos* was an exquisite, a fop in dress, a cynic in philosophy, he understood thoroughly the waging of war.

"Your Excellency," ventured Trevisani, "must appreciate the urgent necessity of keeping the Mongols out of—the empire."

"I do. The gods have arranged the matter beautifully. *Ehu*, the fire-eating Georgians will destroy the man-eating Mongols."

It was the duty of the *strategos* to watch the passes of the Khaukesh and to keep his finger on the pulse of the Georgians. The day was long since past when the legions of Pompey and Justinian had made their camps in the shadow of the mountain girdle of Tphilis. Now the soldiery of the Empire was kept under arms at home, around Constantinople and the sacred person of Theodore Lascaris.

And the host of the empire numbered its barbarian Northmen and Goths and wild tribesmen, as well as Greeks, and of late the coffers and ships of Genoa had revived the failing strength of the last of the Cæsars.

"Our interests lie together in this," murmured the merchant. "John the Constable must not make truce with the invaders."

The *strategos* raised his eyes.

"Our interest?"

"You promised him the aid of the empire," observed Trevisani. "How?"

The *strategos* bent over the chessmen. He had no armed strength with him at Tphilis, and little at Trebizond, the nearest Greek port. In various wars the Georgians had served under the standards of the empire, loyally, because the Holy City of Constantinople was still the

Mecca of their faith. Nevertheless, Georgia was a kingdom and jealous of its liberty.

"Ask, in the Chersonese," he said slowly, and Trevisani sank back in his chair. It was not well to inquire too closely into the secrets of the emperor.

"And yet," resumed the *strategos*, "here in the Khaukesh a child has done my work for me. The chit Rusudan has fired the blood of these mountaineers. She is old enough to delight in the love of men, and too young to dread the sting of wounds."

Trevisani glanced at his companion shrewdly.

"Eh, a tearing little beauty! Her eyes have not missed you."

"But they, my good *Comptor*, are not yet the eyes of a woman. And she is a mere bundle of whims and—affection. She hugs the flea-ridden hunting dogs and sheds tears with the Gipsy wenches."

"And still, she is beautiful—" Trevisani wagged his long head knowingly—"as shining gold."

"A poor simile. Say rather, pallid, edged steel that wounds when you grasp it. A real lure, my dear Antonio, lies in these round-armed and wanton Circassian girls with not a thought in their yellow heads save for sweetments and perfumes."

"Eh — eh!" Trevisani blinked and smiled as if he, too, wished to express the charms of the Circassians.

"I have heard that those with sound teeth and delicate skin sell for a hundred and fifty gold pieces at the Chersonese." He filled his goblet and stood up. "I yield the game to your Excellency. My king is lost. Let us empty a cup—to success."

"To victory," smiled the *strategos*, "for—the emperor."

He thrust back his chair and reached for the flagon of wine. Even as he did so, a gust of icy air entered the embrasure, and the candles flickered, dying to pinpoints under the blast. Silver crashed and tinkled on the chess-board, and when the candles flared up again the two men saw the flagon on its side and red wine flooding the miniature battlefield.

"A fair portent!" cried the merchant. "Here is blood among the pawns."

But Choaspes, drawing clear his cloak from the dripping wine, shivered a little.

"These accursed winds!"

Trevisani, taking up a candle, withdrew; and no sooner had the merchant reached his own chamber than he felt in the wallet at his girdle and drew forth a roll of thin parchment, no larger than his finger. Over this he bent eagerly, tracing out the delicate Syraic writing.

> *To the merchant Antonio at Tphilis, greeting. Know, most generous patron, that I, Rabban Simeon, have met with the man you were seeking in the eastern caravan roads. Know that he is without doubt the Frank whose death is desired by the eternal emperor. He is to be recognized by his yellow hair, his gray eyes and the straight sword he bears. The search was long; the reward to be bestowed by your generosity is certain. I send this by the hand of Daim, the Tcherkessian horse dealer, who has been promised ten dinars.*

This missive had reached the worthy della Trevisani at the last harvest time. Since then he had heard no more from the Syrian physician, who had been seeking patiently for news of the wandering crusader.

"Five thousand pieces of gold," the Genoese murmured. "And now this Frank hath come to Tphilis. But the proof of his death must be sure. Either his head—or he must be taken to the emperor a captive."

And Messer Antonio fell to musing. It was not a simple matter to cut the head from the stalwart shoulders of this Frank who was, besides, serving as ambassador of the Khan. Messer Antonio did not wish to see Sir Hugh return to the camp of the Mongols. All things considered, he decided to tempt the crusader to journey with him to Trebizond, and to take ship for the Chersonese. Once on shipboard

he could be disarmed and chained and so brought to the emperor.

"Though time presses," he reflected, "if the emperor lies ill."

He rolled up the parchment and sought his couch, well content. He was even more pleased two days later when a rumor in the town assured him of the constable's final answer to the Khan. It had been sent down the valley, this answer, in a basket. And the basket held the severed heads of the two Mongol envoys who had been detained outside Tphilis. Messer Antonio now saw his way clear to claim the five thousand pieces of gold.

CHAPTER VI

THE WIT OF MESSER ANTONIO

RUSUDAN was restless, and this morning her maids exasperated her until she dismissed them all and snatched up an ermine coat, a green silk kerchief and a pair of shapely morocco boots. The kerchief she bound around her head, knotting it loosely over one ear, and the boots she slipped on with the ease of long practise, first kicking off a pair of slippers embroidered with seed pearls. Though there was a mirror of polished bronze near the door of her chamber, she did not pause to glance into it.

Not many women could have worn so many colors and so different materials to advantage. But Rusudan looked bewitching, and this was because she was excited. Her eyes grew deeper and wider and a half-smile of anticipation touched her lips. The silver heels of her boots clinked merrily on the flagstones of the outer hall.

Rupen of Kag, who had come to Tphilis that morning, was waiting to greet her, and with him she talked earnestly for half the turning of the sand glass in the antechamber.

"Send Messer Antonio to me," she demanded. "Nay, go and seek him and bid him come to me upon the wall."

Having rid herself of the Prince of Kag, she went more slowly to the balcony overlooking the great hall, and thence by a dark flight of steps to a certain stretch of the parapet between the two gate towers of the donjon. Here, from the courtyard below, she had often seen the Frank standing.

The door of his chamber opened out upon this part of the wall. And Rusudan, seeing no one here, glanced beyond the wall, down the valley.

It was a clear morning, and every detail stood out against the snow—the gray dome of the great Malaki church beside the castle, the deep gorge to the left where the ice-bound Kur wrestled and tore itself free over the rapids by the lower town. And the twisted streets of Tphilis, sprinkled with red roofs, with ancient stone walls and the bell towers of chapels—all far beneath the castle wall.

Tphilis was in truth the Gate of the Khaukesh, and the castle was the key of the gate. To the right rose a cliff of brown limestone, and across the gorge of the Kur its very twin, a thousand-foot ridge that was dwarfed by the more distant forested slopes rising into the clouds. And above the clouds Rusudan could see the summits of the loftier ranges.

Here, at the castle, the valley narrowed to a gut. Below, it widened steadily, until the Kur appeared to be no more than an inanimate gray serpent stretched in the snow.

To Rusudan the sight was as familiar and as beloved as the icy wind blasts that flushed her cheeks and tore at the mass of her dark hair under the 'kerchief. Before the door of the Frank's chamber she hesitated a moment, and mocked ceremony by knocking upon it vigorously.

The door opened, revealing the crusader, his sheathed sword in his left hand.

"*Ai*," cried Rusudan, "do you always bear a weapon?" And then she made shift to speak in the *lingua franca* that she had picked up from the Greeks. "Sir Hugh, I greet you well. It is time for you to go upon the snow road."

"Is the constable ready to reply?"

"Yesterday he sent his answer." Anxiety darkened the blue eyes of the girl, and

she motioned the knight to come closer. "It is over—finished. Now you are free to go on to the sea, and the ports of Frankistan. You must go—now!"

Hugh shook his head gravely.

"Nay, Princess Rusudan, I shall bear the answer of your lords to the Mongols."

"But the—answer is sent, down the valley." She stamped upon the hard-packed snow impatiently. "O, you are very stupid, Sir Hugh of Taranto. Messer Antonio told me your name. He is ready to depart for Trebizond with a caravan of linen cloth and ivory. He promised he would take you."

She turned to greet the merchant, who had drawn near and stood waiting to be summoned.

"What message did John the Constable send?" Hugh asked bluntly, and the Georgian lifted her head proudly and not a little defiantly.

"War—without truce or any mercy!"

The crusader nodded.

"My horse has been brought into the castle. Now I must ask your leave to depart, to the Horde."

Rusudan's expressive eyes looked a volume of questions.

"But why? The caravan would take you, Sir Frank, to your folk. You have been seeking a way out of the pagan land. Why would you ride back?"

And Messer Antonio, whose lean brown face betrayed nothing at all, glanced at the crusader sharply.

"Because, my lady, it was the order of Subotai Bahadur that I should return to the Horde."

"And do you, a knight of the Cross, obey the commands of a pagan lord?"

"He released me from the Horde, bidding me come back. That shall I do, taking with me the Mongols who await me in the lower valley."

Rusudan and the merchant were silent, and presently the girl went to the parapet and stood looking down upon a swarm of sparrows that clamored around the niches in the gray stone.

"Is it your wish to leave Tphilis?"

And Hugh made answer gravely.

"'Tis a fair land and—the wine is good."

Rusudan whirled around and faced him angrily.

"Know, then, that your pagan comrades have been sent to their Khan. But I will not suffer you to leave Tphilis—nay, though it is an ill place, and bleak and barren, and its people barbarians."

And, having spoken, she was gone into the stair entrance, leaving the crusader astonished and the merchant thoughtful. In no more than a moment Messer Antonio altered his plans and approached his companion pleasantly.

"The wine, you say, is excellent, Sir Hugh, and—the moods of a young girl past understanding. In another hour her Highness will be of another mind. Meanwhile—" his keen eye followed the figures of a group of warriors down the ramp—"let us to a tavern to sup and talk."

NOW, as they threaded the alleys that led to the tavern at the river's side, the thoughts of both men were on Rusudan. Antonio della Trevisani reflected that Rusudan was no longer a child; she did unexpected and unlooked-for things.

For hours she would sit brooding on the walls or in the forest chapel where her brother lay. The Genoese was a keen observer and he felt sure that Rus dan, who had formerly paid John the Constable the careless reverence of a young animal, now watched him and the *strategos* with puzzled eyes. She no longer romped with the hunting dogs.

"Eh," he said to himself, "our maid is growing up. She has wild blood in her, and it angers her now that others should give orders to her people."

Rusudan smiled upon Choaspes often and led him to talk of the imperial court and the Golden Chersonese. But the shrewd Genoese did not think she had any love for the *strategos*.

"The maid learns to dissemble," he meditated. "By the saints, that is nothing strange in a woman, but in a barbarian Georgian it is a miracle."

And it seemed to Messer Antonio that

Rusudan, who had just now stormed at the Frank, had bidden him first to go from her presence and then to stay, was fond of the tall stranger. Messer Antonio glanced up covertly at the dark profile of the crusader, framed in its tangle of yellow curls, at the clear, gray eyes and firm-set lips.

"Eh," he whispered under his breath, "either he is a very clever spy or he is telling the truth. And he is not clever, because he does not see that Rusudan makes much of him. Hmm."

The crusader, Messer Antonio decided, would carry out a purpose doggedly, would not be swerved from his determination to go back to the pagans. And this was as unexpected as it was unwelcome to Messer Antonio.

So the Genoese quickened his steps, following with his eyes the tall figure of Rupen of Kag who was bound, no doubt, for his favorite tavern kept by a Bokharian near the street of the leather workers, where the din of the Kur drowned the curses and clatter of all too frequent broils. And Messer Antonio smiled, preparing to play a delightful little game, in which there was no slightest risk to himself and an almost sure profit in sight.

Striding beside him, Hugh hummed, deep-throated, a snatch he had heard Rusudan sing:

> "Arg my falcon is quick to see
> Quest and quarry, and swift to go
> Beyond the clouds, and back to me—
> Does he love me or not?
> How do I know?"

In the mind of the crusader was a warm delight. It was pleasant in this mountain hamlet; the sun was bright; the gay surcoats and colored boots of the people struck his fancy. He stared at one of the jolly little priests in sugar-loaf hats and smiled at a ragged girl who was carrying a gilded candle toward the great church of the Malaki. And Rusudan—

He would be well content to abide in Tphilis for a few days. It would not be so pleasant riding back alone, as with that wayward gipsy Rusudan, even in a storm.

"Arg my falcon is quick to see—"

"Come!" Trevisani stooped under the lintel of a clay hut with horn windows, deep in the shadow of the hill. And the merchant shivered as if the breath of the river ice had touched him.

A score of hillmen and Circassians sat on the cushions by the stove against the wall, and no one made way for the twain from the castle. Rupen of Kag paused in the act of casting off his heavy *burka* and eyed them insolently. Then he threw himself into a chair at the head of the one table, and the men who sat by him greeted him volubly.

But there was silence when Trevisani and Hugh took the two empty chairs beside Rupen, who ordered a great beaker of Shiraz wine from the tavern keeper and lifted it with a stentorian "Hail!"

The Circassians began to whisper among themselves, and an Armenian lad who had been tuning a guitar laid it across his knees and stared at the men around the table. Rupen emptied his beaker, drew his sleeve across his mustache and looked both angry and ill at ease.

"My Lord," Trevisani whispered to him, "this is scant courtesy. My companion the Frank is a belted knight, and mighty are his deeds. 'Tis said no man can stand against him with the sword."

"Hide of the devil! What is it to me?"

"True," nodded the Genoese. "He hath the immunity of his mission. Still, his message was insolent."

"*Tfu!* It was answered in the right way." Rupen surveyed the unconscious crusader with grudged admiration. "Well, his courage is proof."

He emptied his second beaker with a grunt of satisfaction.

"May we meet when the weapons are at play."

"By the blessed body of St. Marco, what a pity it is that this Frank should be set free to aid the pagans!"

Rupen ran a calloused hand through the bristle of his hair.

"True, a pity!"

"Better to slay him with the others. Then the pagans would know beyond

peradventure that the men of the Khaukesh have no fear of them."

"That is so, Messer Antonio. And yet the order of the constable—" Rupen slapped his broad belt—"bade me cut off the heads of the two in my charge and send them down the valley. Thus it was done. About this Frank nothing was said in the order."

"Is it certain?" Trevisani's eyes were fixed on the big mountaineer's belt. "There may have been something said."

"Nay, by Tamar! And yet a priest read it to me."

"So? He may have mistaken a word."

"A-ah!" Rupen pulled forth a scrap of soiled parchment and wrinkled his brow over it, though he could decipher not a word. "Here is the order sent by the constable."

He watched eagerly while the merchant glanced over the missive.

"True," murmured Trevisani. "The priest read aright. Surely the constable meant to deal with this traitor in his own way. And yet—"

"What?"

"The Frank is a *mhendruli*—a sword bearer of prowess—and Rusudan hath befriended him. Who would dare lift hand against him?"

"By the graves of Ani—I dare!"

The thin lips of the merchant puckered; he fingered the slip of parchment and eyed Hugh covertly as the crusader quaffed spiced wine with relish.

"Your companion envoys, my Lord Frank, were well entreated by Prince Rupen. *He* sent them back to the Horde."

"Aye, so," Hugh assented.

"He sent their heads in a basket strapped to a donkey's back."

And quietly Hugh set down his bowl of wine.

"They were slain?"

"Here is proof!" Messer Antonio held out the parchment as if it might be a shield to protect him against the grief and anger that smoldered in Hugh's eyes.

"The Khan of Almalyk," the crusader whispered, "lord of fifty thousand swords and the other that bore a tiger tablet."

"The third—the servant—escaped."

Hugh turned the bowl slowly in his powerful hands. Arslan had fled. He would have stolen a horse from the herd and have gone to the Horde without pause for rest or food—he, the dispatch rider who had carried the post from Kambalu. Ere yesterday he would have reached Subotai's *yurta* with the news. Hugh had been powerless to prevent the slaying of the envoys, but Arslan could not know that.

"It was easily done," smiled Trevisani. "They knelt to the sword with empty hands; nor did they defend their lives."

"By the Cross!" Hugh remembered the order he had given the Mongols, fearing a brawl between them and the Georgians. With two dead, and the manner of their death told to the Horde, his mission was at an end. And there was no slightest doubt that Subotai would require his life as retribution.

Nor could he go now in any case beyond Tphilis to the sea, whither Rusudan—for an instant he wondered whether the maid of Karthlos had known of the slaying of the envoys, and had wished to send him away where safety lay. But no, the girl was heedless. It had been a whim.

Then he looked around the table and was aware that the warriors were staring at him, and Rupen sneering. His lips tightened and his brow cleared. His mission ended, an end there would be also of words. One blow he could strike to justify himself.

Thrusting back his chair, he drew a steel gauntlet from his belt and threw it at the feet of the Prince of Kag. His hand closed on Trevisani's shoulder and the merchant winced.

"Say to this lord," Hugh bade him, "that he may have my head also—if he lives. Say that I will meet him within the lists afoot or horsed, with whatever weapon he chooses and upon whatever day. Upon his body will I requite a foul wrong and an unknightly deed."

"God's wounds!" roared the Georgian. "What care I for lists and barriers? Let him look to himself, the dog!"

His right hand whipped free the heavy *yataghan* and his left hand gripped the table's edge. A heave and thrust, and the table went over, bearing with it a pair of hillmen who were tardy in getting out of the way.

"Stay!" cried Trevisani, dancing with anxiety, and with one eye on the crusader's great broadsword. "Challenge the Frank with axes."

"Now!" Rupen cried, heeding the advice. "Only let it be now, with axes and shields. Look—the ground is level and the snow is hard."

"Aye, so," said Hugh.

CHAPTER VII

BLOOD IN THE SNOW

MESSER ANTONIO, who had seen Rupen wield an ax in the lists before now, was filled with satisfaction. He had little doubt of the outcome, in spite of the crusader's strength, because he knew that the handling of the heavy battle-axes—short in the shaft and broad in the edge—was a different affair altogether than sword-play, and Hugh was a swordsman.

With the ax there was no parrying. Nor would the chain-mail in which each warrior stood be proof against a full blow of the tempered axes.

Eager hands had brought two stout shields of polished steel from the street of the weapon makers.

Messer Antonio shivered under his velvet coat lined with sables as he stepped out of the tavern door. No priest had been summoned to shrive the adversaries, or any herald to order the fight. It would be swift and terrible, that was sure.

But even in these few moments the tidings had spread from alley to wine shop, and a throng of *abreks*—mountain peasants—tramped through the snow to the cleared space by the river. They stood in a hollow square, the mist of their breathing rising into the air. From the river came the sound of ice grinding and churning in the rapids below them.

"This Frank," muttered a bearded noble from one of the northern passes, "is not as others. There is power in him."

"How power?" asked a blacksmith who had pushed into the front rank and stood arms on hips, his heavy shoulders covered with a bear-skin.

"Strength to wield this sword," explained the *aznaur* grimly. He had been given the mighty blade of Durandal in its leather sheath to hold, and he had been weighing it with amazement. "Take it in thy hand."

"No, by the Cross of Ani! 'Tis said the sword hath a spell upon it, and certain it is that the blade was not made in these days. Well for the Lord of Kag that he does not face such a weapon. Look, he knows what he is about—treading the snow to test its firmness."

The Georgian had examined his shield, which was triangular in shape and very little bowed. He settled the steel cap firmly over the mesh of his mail hood, so that the nasal and cheek pieces came well down. He glanced up at the sun, and slipped the leather loop of his ax shaft around his wrist.

Hugh stood quietly at the other side of the square. All at once he lifted his shield.

"Because I am an envoy to this court," he said, "blame might come to the Lord of Kag if I should fall. Hear me! I hold him blameless, for I was the challenger."

"You will fall," growled Rupen.

"As God wills," cried Trevisani. "Begin, messers."

A deep sigh that was half a shout ran through the spectators as Rupen of Kag paced forward quickly. He took short steps, planting his feet firmly. His shield was raised and tilted in front of his chest.

Twice Rupen struck Hugh's shield—clashing blows that dented the steel. He edged forward and lashed out at Hugh's head, only to check the sweep of the ax in mid-air, for the crusader had stepped back swiftly. To miss a blow with the ax was to invite a return cut that might lay him on the ground.

"See!" The smith nudged the bearded hillman. "The Frank gives back."

But the warrior was too interested to answer. Hugh had begun to attack, and the strident clang of steel echoed in the river gorge. Always Rupen met the ax-edge with his shield, turning the face of it slightly, so that the crusader's weapon never met it fairly. Once, as they passed through deep shadow, the smith saw sparks leap, and he swore softly.

Steam was rising from the mailed forms of the two men; they shook the sweat from their eyes when there was an instant's pause in the play of the axes. And always Rupen invited Hugh to attack.

And a murmur swelled in the throng, a murmur that rose to a hoarse shout.

"Such blows were never seen!" roared the bearded Georgian, without taking his eyes from the axes that flashed now without cessation in the sunlight. "Ha—"

A corner of Rupen's shield had cracked, and at the next blow it flew off. But the crusader's shield was badly dented and the arm that held it was growing numb from the sledge-like impacts.

And now the Georgian pressed the attack with the utmost of his strength. Only once had the crusader's weapon met his shield fairly, but the shock of that blow had cracked the steel, and Rupen feared that another such blow would break the bones in his arm.

He had meant to tire his enemy and then smash in his guard. Now it seemed to him that the crusader would never tire. And never had Rupen faced a man who could strike such a blow. The muscles of his left shoulder were strained and his whole side ached. If his shield were split it would be the end.

Both men were panting; they leaped forward and staggered back, and the *clash-clang* of the axes grew more deafening.

"Ha!" gasped the Georgian. "For Rusudan!"

He sprang against the crusader, shield meeting shield. He shortened his grasp on the ax and cut savagely at his foe's head. The edge of the ax dented the steel cap, and blood flowed down over Hugh's temple.

Again Rupen repeated the maneuver, and as Hugh gave back, the Georgian's ax flashed down under shield and arm-pit. The edge smote the steel links over Hugh's heart, driving them through the leather jacket and into the flesh. A bone cracked.

Rupen shouted hoarsely. He was weary; his veins seemed afire and his knees quivered. But he saw the crusader's face turn white under the blood when his ax smote the dented shield. Movement was agony to Hugh, and the shock of the blows made his head swim. His ears rang and it seemed to him that the trampled snow had turned the hue of blood.

Still he did not cry out or groan. He was able to hold up the battered shield. The two men circled, the din of the axes unceasing, blood spattering from their limbs.

"A moment more," the smith whispered under his breath. "No more than a moment."

He had seen the crusader's ax glance against Rupen's right arm, and the steel chain-mail break asunder.

Rupen's bare arm flashed down and up—up and down. His eyes glared into the set face of the crusader. And it seemed to Rupen as if the gray eyes bored into his brain like points of steel. Since the first blow they had not swerved, nor did they change expression, save that—and Rupen growled, though the pulse was hammering in his throat—now the crusader's lips smiled.

For the end was at hand, as the smith had said, for one or the other.

Sheer fury gripped the powerful Georgian. He sprang forward, his right arm quivering over his head. Midway in his leap he was stopped, his ears ringing with the impact of tortured steel. For the second time the crusader's ax had struck squarely on the Georgian's shield.

Though he felt no hurt, Rupen groaned, staggering back. He, the ax-man, the skilled fighter, knew that now there was

no hope for him. The blow on the shield had numbed his left arm from fingers to shoulder and he could no longer raise his shield.

Back he staggered, making no outcry save the hoarse groaning that welled out of his throat. He saw the crusader leap toward him, and he made an effort to parry with his ax the shining steel that swept down.

Rupen was struck where the throat meets the shoulder and, though the mesh of his Turkish mail held together, the bones of his shoulder were crushed in, the sinews torn apart. He was dashed to the ground, and lay motionless.

From the silent spectators Trevisani emerged and bent over the figure outstretched in the crimson snow.

"Eh," he muttered, "if he lives he will never take weapon in hand again."

Hugh cast away his ax and stepped toward his fallen adversary. Then his knees bent and he went down with a clash of steel, and lay with his hand pressed to his side.

The Georgians thronged around the two champions in silence. They had seen a duel with axes that would live always in their memory, a duel whose story would be told again in after years throughout the Khaukesh.

SHOTHA KUPRI, making his way through the almost deserted street of the silversmiths, was hailed by a thin figure in a flying cloak and long cloth shoes that hastened through the trampled mud.

"Messer Antonio," he growled, "what is this?"

"Madness!" cried the Genoese. "St. Marco be my aid! The Frank hath slain Rupen in a duel with axes and lies close to purgatory himself. But he is mad; he is beside himself. He asks to be put in a horse litter and sent down the valley—"

"With axes!" Shotha Kupri's shaggy brows lifted incredulously.

"As God lives. Hasten, good my Lord, hurry your steps. The *abreks* think he is dying, and besides they are minded to humor him because he wielded his weapon like a devil. But he must not pass down the valley. He has seen too much in Tphilis."

"Humph!"

Shotha Kupri wasted no breath in words, lengthening his stride until he pushed through the multitude by the river and came upon a sight that would have turned a weaker stomach.

At once he ordered Rupen to be borne to the castle on his own *burka*. Then, after a glance at Hugh's face, he knelt down and felt the crusader's side, nodding grimly when the wounded man gritted his teeth.

"My Lord Frank," he said, "at Nakha you gave life to me when the Mongol arrows were drawn against me. I have not forgotten. Ask what you will of Shotha Kupri."

"My horse," whispered Hugh. "My sword bound to the saddle—"

"But not that. Three days of riding in this case and you will find yourself greeting the angels."

The shadow of a smile passed over the knight's wan features.

"Better to go now than be found here by the Horde. My Lord of Nakha, I must go upon the road."

Shotha Kupri shook his head, and gave an order to several of the warriors, who brought forward a stout cloak and lifted Hugh upon it.

"Cold binds the lower valley," said the *thawad* bluntly. "And you, my Lord, will not sit a saddle until your bones knit."

He signed to the warriors, who started off toward the castle, the man from the northern passes trudging behind with the great sword Durandal.

The swaying and jolting as they climbed up the rough ramp brought the red mist again before Hugh's eyes, and when he tried to raise his head it seemed to him as if he were plunging down a road that became darker and darker, until dazzling flames appeared on every side. The rumble of Shotha Kupri's voice

became a roar, and he came to rest in darkness and silence.

AFTER a while he was sure that this abyss was a place of torment, because iron fingers pressed and pulled at his injured side and a wave of pain swept through him. Bones grated within him and his skull felt as if it were split asunder.

From a vast distance he heard Shotha Kupri's voice.

"By the saints, such scars have I never seen!"

Then Hugh was certain that he was being tortured, and the memory of his old wounds—of simitar cuts and bones splintered by maces and the searing stab of javelin points in his limbs—burned him like flame.

He was glad when the torturers ceased their labors and he could sleep. But the abyss was chilled by an icy wind, and he woke to feel his feet and hands benumbed with cold. This time he could open his eyes; he beheld a spluttering torch and smoke that swirled around the figure of a mild looking Syrian and another form clad in black velvet. He was sure that these must be Rabban Simeon and Antonio della Trevisani. And he was angry because it seemed to him that they were the torturers of this place.

"Avaunt ye, fiends!" he shouted. "Brewers of perdition—unhorned devils!"

He grew more angry because his shout dwindled to a whisper, and the torch began to vanish. He heard a woman's clear laugh and raged inwardly because Rusudan mocked him.

The pit of darkness now became intolerably hot. He cursed his servitors who would not bring him wine or water. Cool hands touched his forehead and the pulse that beat in his throat was like Rupen's ax upon his battered shield.

The hammer strokes grew louder, though he felt the relief of water in his throat, and after a while he knew that he had left the pit behind, and he grew very cunning. He kept silence so that no one would discover that he had escaped from the place of torture. A blinding sun troubled him, because he could not open his eyes and his head pained him.

Still, he was satisfied. He had escaped to the desert by Antioch, and a battle raged around him, while men panted in the heat and he cried commands to his followers to order their line and refrain from casting off their helms.

So Hugh fought again the battle of Antioch where his comrades had perished and the Greek emperor had betrayed him.

Only it seemed to him that he was dead, because his voice made no sound and somewhere Rusudan was singing softly. He knew not the words of the song, but the melody was restful as the chiming of little golden bells or the ripple of water over stones.

Hugh no longer felt the heat and clamor of the battle. A longing came upon him to seek Rusudan. Her voice called him without ceasing; still he might not see her or lay hand on her.

"My lady!" he cried.

And though his whisper was hoarse as a raven's note, the song ceased. In darkness and silence Hugh sought for the maid of Tphilis, aware of the faint scent of jasmine that clung to her hair.

The fever still raced through his veins, and he thought that a lamp had been lighted in the pit, only the torture place had changed its aspect and was quite certainly a vaulted room. And Rusudan was bending over him. No fingers stroked his forehead. Instead, cool lips pressed against his closed eyelids and his cheek.

For a while Hugh lay quiet. Surely that *was* a light, and the torturers were gone. Some one lay beside him on the bed, because he could hear the even breathing of sleep and could see a figure covered with a linen robe.

He moved his hand and felt heavy tresses of unbound hair. The form near him stirred, with swiftly indrawn breath. Then a little laugh that did not mock him.

The light moved and vanished, and Hugh was left alone, the scent of jasmine still on the pillow and coverlet beside him.

CHAPTER VIII

THE EVE OF BATTLE

THE fever had left the crusader after three days, and for the rest of the week he slept mightily, eating more and more heartily, until the Georgian youths who served him ushered in Shotha Kupri in full mail, a shield on his arm and snow still clinging to his fur *burka*. He stood by Hugh in silence, and then stripped off the bandages that bound the wounded man's left arm to his side.

Hugh saw that the flesh was bruised and lacerated from arm-pit to waist. Shotha Kupri grunted.

"It is healing, by God's will. I am no physician, but Rusudan would not let the Syrian Rabban lay hand on thee."

"She came here?"

Shotha Kupri tugged at his bristling mustache.

"Am I a tiring woman, to know the coming and going forth of my princess? Praise God that thy bones have knit."

"Was the Syrian Rabban Simeon?"

"Aye, that he was. With Messer Antonio he has taken horse for the western trail." The *thawad* stared at Hugh, shook his grizzled head and fingered the ax in his belt. "A pity thou art friend to the pagans and unfriend to us. If aught befalls—mark me—if there be peril, thy gray stallion is in the stable by the north wall."

So saying, he strode from the chamber, leaving the crusader thoughtful. That evening Hugh asked one of the pages whether the Princess Rusudan was in the castle.

"Nay, my Lord, she rides with John the Constable. The mailed host hath moved from Tphilis now that the standards are lifted."

Hugh, bethinking him, remembered that for days he had heard unwonted bustle in the courtyard and the town below—the neighing of horses, the blare of trumpets and distant shouting. Even now he was aware of a creaking of carts, a jangling of trace chains that dwindled in the distance.

That evening the bells of Tphilis rang out in chorus, the giant bell of the church near the castle adding its sonorous boom to the chiming. Hugh had been left to himself, but when he heard singing in the town below he rose and pulled on shirt, tunic and gambeson with his good arm, and went to look out of the embrasure.

The ice chilled air of the mountains swept in, and he sniffed the odor of pines. A round moon peered through drifting clouds, outlining upon the snow the shadows of a procession moving up the hill toward the church.

The young girls at the head of the singers carried lighted tapers and seemed to be escorting a patriarch in cope and glittering robes, and as they passed by the castle barbican Hugh caught the Greek words—

"*Kyrie eleison—Christe eleison!*"

He searched the throng for Rusudan, but she was not there. Nor did he see any men except the patriarch and his priests.

He knew that the women of Tphilis were going to the great church to pray for the mailed host of the warriors. The chiming of the bells ceased as they entered the arches of the Malaki, and Hugh heard a slight movement behind him. Turning, he beheld a slender figure in the doorway of the chamber, a figure erect and gayly clad, that advanced slowly into the circle of lamplight and uttered an exclamation of surprize at seeing the bed empty.

"Your Excellency," said Hugh, "seeks me?"

Choaspes glanced at him and nodded good-naturedly.

"As you see. I come to felicitate the Jerusalem pilgrim that he is still numbered among the living."

"For such courtesy am I beholden to the noble *strategos*."

The Greek inclined his head, lifting his right hand in a graceful gesture, his left hand pressing the folds of his scarlet cloak to his breast.

"Do you indulge, Messer Frank, in the sport of kings—the pagan game of chess?"

Hugh shook his head silently.

"A pity—I vow to St. Bacchus, it is a pity. Trevisani gone, the wild little Rusudan out in the snows, this court of barbarians becomes exceeding dull."

He sighed and glanced at the crusader idly. Yet with that glance he weighed Hugh in his mind. The *strategos* was neither lazy nor effeminate, though he looked both. The frontier officer of an empire must be able to judge men, and in this respect Choaspes was not a whit behind Trevisani. The proof of it was that the *strategos* owed the merchant a great deal of money, but the merchant feared the *strategos*.

"By all the gods!" Choaspes leaned on the embrasure ledge, allowing Hugh to see that his left hand held no weapon. "A land as barren and hideous as its people. The women, however, are not always ugly."

"I have seen men less honorable."

"*Ehu!* I forgot, you are new come from the pagan land."

"I did not mean the men of Cathay." Hugh frowned a little. "In their way they do not lack faith."

"You have lived among them, Sir Hugh. And that brings me to my point. At the court of Theodore Lascaris, in the Golden Chersonese, there was a rare welcome for him who brings fresh tidings or a new tale. This Horde out of Cathay savors of the magical—of the powers of darkness. By Venus her girdle, I swear it is the host of Gog and Magog! The tale of it would divert the emperor and win you favor."

"Aye, so."

"And perchance bring my name to the imperial remembrance." Choaspes laughed good-naturedly. " 'Tis my duty to forward the news of the Khaukesh. Come, what say you to a purse for the road, a pair of my followers to serve you and, at the end of the road, the Golden Chersonese. Faith, I envy you."

Hugh looked out upon the moonlit valley.

"No need, my Lord. My road lies down the valley."

The dark eyes of the *strategos* dwelt an instant on the falcon tablet that gleamed at the knight's throat.

"*That* will avail you little, Sir Hugh, for Mongol envoys have been slain, and perchance your life is forfeit. I have talked with Rabban Simeon, who tells a tale—a strange tale, mark you—of a certain oath of brotherhood that passed between you and the pagan chieftain."

"The tale is truth."

"Ah." The shapely fingers of the Greek wandered from the cross of glowing opals on his bare chest to the silver chain that held the dagger sheath to his girdle. "Well, Simeon and the Genoese *comptor* are far from Tphilis. And I—" he smiled—"I wish you well, Sir Hugh. A gallant spirit—mark me! Yet consider well, if it were bruited in Tphilis that you have sworn a secret oath to this lord of the pagans, and if the fortune of the field should go against the Georgians, why, they might tear you limb from limb or set you on a stake to wriggle out your life. A caitiff's fate, unworthy a girded knight. Bethink you, and seek sanctuary with the emperor."

Hugh smiled. Save within the portals of the great church whence came the faint refrain of song, sanctuary for him there was none.

"In the fiend's name," quoth Choaspes, "what will you do?"

"Ride to the battle." The scarred fingers of the crusader closed in his beard. "My Lord, when steel clashes and the arrow flights whip the air, there is an end of doubt and a man may know the will of the Seigneur God."

"My Lord, you are in no case to back a horse."

Choaspes shrugged a shoulder; then turned at a sound behind him, his fingers slipping the slender dagger from its sheath.

The other door had opened, though no one stood within it. Upon the stone floor, drawing himself toward them by use of one arm and by the thrust of a leg beneath him, Rupen crawled.

His left shoulder and arm were bound with bloodied bandages, less white than

his haggard countenance from which dull eyes turned slowly from the Greek to the crusader. When he moved he panted, and once as he lay prone he pointed a quivering finger at Hugh and spoke.

"Rusudan."

The knight took up the lamp and, going in the other chamber, saw a pallet bed, the blankets fallen to the floor. Here behind the massive stone partition Rupen had lain.

"Rusudan," the wounded Georgian growled again.

"The fever is in him," said Hugh. "Come, my Lord Strategos, we will aid him to his couch. My strength avails not."

"Nor my inclination," observed Choaspes. "'Tis a heavy animal, and means you no good."

He lingered a moment contemplating the two who had fought such a duel not many days ago, and then left the chamber. But Hugh shouted for the serving knaves and the youthful squire appeared. With his help Rupen was drawn back to bed, but no sooner was he in the blankets than he gripped the squire and spoke, low-voiced. The boy flushed and crossed himself upon forehead and breast.

"Lord Frank," he said, "Rupen of Kag saith this, 'The priest who came to shrive him brought word from the Malaki. The Horde hath crossed the Nakha ridge and rides up the valley of the Kur. John the Constable hath arrayed his standards in battle order, and before two nights the issue will be joined. And the princess Rusudan is with the Constable.'"

"In two days!" Hugh's right hand caught the lad's shoulder. "Go, you—order my horse saddled."

The crusader turned to Rupen. The ax-man had crawled from his bed in spite of pain and tormented pride to give this message to Hugh. For an instant the crusader wondered why Rupen had not made his appeal to the *strategos*. Did he trust the Greek?

Rupen loved Rusudan with all the savage jealousy of the mountain breed. But he had crawled to the man who had worsted him in single combat—with his own weapon—thinking, perhaps, that Hugh of all men might be of aid to Rusudan.

The bleared eyes of the wounded giant were fastened intently on his late antagonist, as if Rupen wished to make more clear to Hugh the necessity of safeguarding the princess. Scowling and mute, his very earnestness and the pain that wracked him made his message eloquent. His drawn lips parted and he uttered a single word—

"*Gaumerjuba!*" And again, "Be victorious!"

This was the salutation of the Georgians, and Hugh had heard it often.

"May victory be with thee," he responded gravely.

Whatever the result of the battle, he must ride now, and ride swiftly to draw Rusudan out of the path of the Horde. Until this was done he could not rejoin the Mongols. He turned from the bed to seek sword and surcoat and found the Georgian squire still standing in the shadows behind him.

"My horse!"

"At once!" But the squire lingered, and spoke with flushed face, "My Lord, some say you have fellowship with the magicians of Cathay, and others that the glaive* in your hand hath a power beyond human might. Alas, I know not. Yet when the fever was in you the high-born Rusudan tended your hurts. She cherished your life. My Lord, protect her from the Horde."

As if frightened by his own daring or believing that Hugh might summon up some ally of the realm of darkness, the boy hurried off on his mission.

The sunken and bleared eyes of Rupen echoed the pleading of the young Georgian. The ax-man would never lift weapon again in battle. He had felt the strength of the crusader's arm, and in spite of pain and brooding he had no reproach for Hugh.

Nor did any man of the castle try to stay the knight when he donned his furs

*Sword.

and the squire girded upon him the sword Durandal. Except an old castellan and some men-at-arms, all Georgians had left the place.

The gray stallion neighed at his approach, thrusting a soft muzzle into his neck and snorting. But when Hugh had climbed into the saddle, wincing a little, the powerful charger tossed his head and stood motionless, ears twitching.

"Eh," muttered the serf who had groomed the horse, "it can not be true that this lord of Frankland is a fiend, because the stallion hath no fear of him."

"He is not like other lords," replied the squire.

They opened the barbican gate and Hugh rode forth, pacing down the long ramp and through the darkened alleys of Tphilis. When he had left the outer hamlets behind he passed a grove of firs and beheld among the trees the moonlit tower of the chapel where the dead king lay, and beneath the tower the fleeting gleam of a candle.

Throwing his weight upon his right stirrup and slinging the sword—that seemed to have gained weight since his illness—he loosened the rein and let the charger trot, setting his teeth at the first stab of pain.

In the uneven road he could not push forward faster than at a trot, but after a while he was warmed through and the stab in his side became an ache. Only he had to hold the reins in his right hand.

The sky was clear and every bare thicket and dark rock stood out distinctly against the snow. All around him was a quiet rustling, as the night wind stirred the forest growth. From time to time twin balls of green fire shone out of deep shadow where wolf or panther lurked by the trail.

Toward morning he began to pass lines of carts drawn up by the road, and then an outpost where warriors slept by a roaring fire. One of them stood up, stretched and shouted at him, but Hugh kept on his way.

The sun rose unseen and a gray murk filled the valley. He drew rein at a camp of stragglers where a bearded ruffian was swearing in many tongues—a man armed with a rusty *yataghan* and wearing a red-and-green cloak and a turban of sheer blue silk. He was wiping the inside of a pot with a fistful of bread and munching the bread. He glanced up at the silver head-band of the knight's horse and the gold inlay upon the hilt of his sword.

"How far is the *aymak*?" He rubbed his fingers on his surtout and pondered. "Eh, *chelabi*, it is nearer than a day's ride and more than half a day's. All the clans are with the standards."

"How many?"

"They who say fifty thousand lie; they who say thirty thousand tell the truth. Every one knows the battle will be this day."

"Is the Horde in sight?"

The prophet of war screwed up his eyes and fingered his beard.

"Some of it is. By ——, I have seen the Mongols fight before now! Ask the kites and the wolves where the rest of the Horde lies hid. But please to dismount, good my Lord."

Hugh knew the breed of these men—the speaker was a Bokharian. Horse-traders, outwardly, who waited behind the lines to glean spoil from the slain and the wounded. He gathered up his reins and went on.

The Bokharian proved to be at least a sagacious prophet, because at noon he came to the summit of a ridge and saw before him the full array of the Georgians.

CHAPTER IX

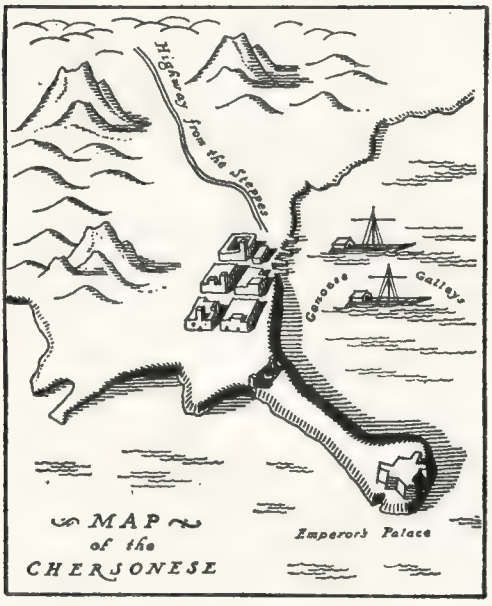
THE VALLEY OF THE KUR

THE clans of the Khaukesh stretched as far as the eye could see, from the bank of the frozen Kur to some low hills covered with pines. They were moving down the valley, away from Hugh, in masses of a thousand or more grouped around the standards and the banners of the princes. As they marched they sang and clashed axes and swords against their shields.

All in the main battle were on foot, even the chieftains. But Hugh saw that the constable had kept apart in the rear of the warriors a body of horse—Circassians.

These, too, were in motion, the ponies plunging into drifts and kicking up a smother of snow when they trotted. A bleak wind swept the valley and the gray sky hid the sun.

Beyond the line of the Georgians Hugh could see the Horde clearly—the black patches that were masses of horsemen. The distance was too great to make out any standards, and Hugh counted the black patches. There were ten, and he knew that each numbered a thousand. They were advancing at a walk.



Though he searched the whole valley, even the low banks of the ice-bound river and the timbered foothills on the far side, he could not discover any other Mongols. The ten thousand looked no larger than so many flocks of sheep in the vast basin between the ranges.

Hugh urged on the tired horse, passing through the last camp of the Georgians where slaves and peasants with their carts stood at gaze. Here were visible the thatched roofs of a hamlet, and when the crusader passed near-by, stalwart mountaineers stared at him and shouted joyfully:

"Eh, Lord Prince, make haste or the onset will be over. 'Tis said the steeds of the accursed Mongols are helpless in the snow."

"Their bowstrings will be damp! Satan is opening his gates for them."

"We will slash them, and they will never see Tphilis!"

So the varlets of the camp cried out, beholding the goodly charger of the stranger and the gold inlay of his sword. And Hugh, who could have answered that the Mongol ponies were accustomed to snow and even to digging beneath it for the scanty forage of dry grass, and that the Mongol bowstrings were silk or waxed cord, passed on in silence, heavy with misgiving. The somber sky was like a pall over the valley and the bitter wind whispered of death.

He had not reached the Circassians before sudden tumult resounded on his right. Toward the foothills patrols of the invaders were retiring before the steady advance of the hillmen. But the shouting and clash of steel meant a charge.

Evidently the Mongol onset was repulsed, because Hugh, hastening on, saw presently the bodies of warriors outstretched and a few riderless ponies galloping off, while groups of Georgians clustered around the wounded and the clamor dwindled to a hum of voices.

No one paid him any attention and he sought anxiously for the standard of the constable, or for sight of Rusudan or Shotha Kupri.

Before seeking Subotai in the Horde he meant to warn Rusudan to leave the field—no easy task. She should never come into the mêlée.

Here were only bands of hillmen, ax and spear on shoulder, striding forward through the snow that was often knee-deep, shouldering and pushing to win nearer the front ranks that had halted.

The reason was clear in a moment. A roar of voices drowned all other sounds, and Hugh rose in his stirrups. The

Mongol center was in motion—a long line of riders trotting toward the Georgians, followed by other lines that plied their bows from the saddle. Arrows whistled into the close-packed mass of Georgians, who answered with cross-bows and, in a moment, with a flight of javelins.

Stung by the flying steel, the shaggy ponies of the Mongols began to rear and plunge before the first line crashed against the spears and shield of the Georgians. Still the arrows whistled. Hugh heard the clash of armor when men dropped near him, heard the oaths of their comrades who pressed on, heedless of hurt, with the single thought of closing with the horsemen.

They did not lack courage, these men of the Khaukesh. Harried by shafts that tore through their leather shields and the chain-mail beneath, they wielded their swords and heavy axes, and the line that had yielded at first, stood firm.

The Mongol charge had been broken. The *tumans* were drawing away, scattering in groups without formation and apparently without leaders.

Hugh, who had seen these same veteran divisions crash through the chivalry of Islam, could not believe them broken; but the impatient Circassians, tossed simitars and spears over their heads.

And then Hugh saw the constable sitting a white horse with cloth-of-silver caparisoning, and beside him the Princess Rusudan, her cheeks aglow with excitement, crying to the mounted escort that hemmed her in—the youthful nobles of the Khaukesh, sons of the chieftains from Hereth and the mountains of Armenia, clad in the finest of velvets and inlaid Turkish mail, with damask-work in their weapons and silver and sapphires in the horse-trappings.

Heads turned inquiringly toward the crusader in tarnished steel, upon a sweat-soaked charger flecked with foam. Rusudan saw him and cried out, started to draw her rein toward him, but checked her brown Arab and waited his approach.

He raised his right hand and spoke:

"Princess Rusudan, where is the aid promised by the emperor? I saw none in the camp or the array of battle?"

She smiled, pointing down the valley with a slender ivory baton tipped by a little crown of gold.

"What need of them? Surely the eternal emperor hath pledged us aid, but, alone, we have cast back the pagans."

"Aye, so."

Rusudan's dark hair whipped across her eyes, and she tossed her head impatiently, her eyes dancing with the almost unbearable exhilaration of earth's utmost game.

"If God had spared my brother to see this day!" And she gazed up at Hugh earnestly. "*Ai*, your wound is not healed. Why are you in the saddle?"

And the crusader, leaning on his saddle-horn, besought her with outstretched hand:

"Ride hence. This is an ill place for a maid."

"Did you come to tell me that? So the constable hath said, but I will not sit with the women."

"You have seen one charge. Stay for no more."

"I will *not* go."

"The real battle is not yet," answered Hugh patiently.

Rusudan beheld the pallor in his lined face, and hot scorn made harsh her clear voice.

"Is this the paladin who bears Roland's sword—who hewed his way to the Sepulchre of the Lord Christ? I cry you shame, Sir Hugh! O, you were quick to draw weapon in an alley brawl over the cups—"

She had seen the truth, that Hugh of Taranto was afraid. But of what he could not say himself. A heavy foreboding lay upon him—the fear that the Horde would still ride over the clans of the Khaukesh and the bright head of Rusudan would lie in trampled snow and blood.

The nobles, urged by fresh excitement, were clamoring around her now, but she reined the Arab to the gray stallion.

"Look up, Sir Craven. You will see

that even a maid may strike a blow against pagans."

A horn resounded near the constable, who had been watching the retreat of the Mongols intently. A chieftain had come up to him, a bearded Circassian who checked his steed with a jangle of bit-chains and thudding of hoofs and pointed down the valley beseechingly. The wild horsemen, held in restraint, were growing resentful of inaction, and the Circassian *crâl* had come to beg for leave to charge. With a nod, John the Constable gave the order.

The Circassian wheeled away as a hawk skims from a thicket, and his men, guessing the command—or resolved to await no command—put their horses to a trot and a gallop that carried them in full career past the princess and through the clans of the main battle, who parted to let them by.

"Forward with me!" Rusudan cried to the youths around her, and they shouted above the clamor of the Circassians. The nobles of Rusudan's escort joined the mass of riders, but Hugh leaned over and gripped her rein.

"Nay! he cried, realizing her purpose.

"Loose my horse. Back, I say!" Rusudan struggled to free her rein, then let it fall and snatched the light simitar from the silver sheath at her side. In her anger she trembled, whispering so that he scarcely heard, "I will strike!"

And the simitar swept up, and down toward his throat, for he made no move to release her. The steel whistled in the air, and was checked in mid-stroke by a mailed hand that held it firm.

John the Constable had heard the rasp of the blade in its sheath and had come to Rusudan's side. He forced the weapon from her hand, thrust it into its scabbard, glanced from the raging girl to the crusader.

"Nay, little Rusudan," he said smiling, "there will be blows enough struck this day. Nor will I permit you to go forward into peril. See, the pagans give way before our horse."

The onset of the Circassians—daring riders, loving well just such a charge as this—had carried them into the retreating squadrons of the Horde. Only Hugh noticed that no arrow flights greeted the constable's cavalry and that the Mongols scattered to the sides rather than fled ahead.

The array of the Circassians began to divide, some turning after the Mongols toward the hills, some spurring at the bands withdrawing to the river. Before long the fighting had broken up into smaller groups and the Mongols were using their bows at last at close quarters.

Seeing this, some of the clans began to run forward from the main array of the Georgians to aid the cavalry. The rest of the warriors on foot were stripping the enemy dead, and even building fires to warm themselves and to heat wine.

To the watchers it seemed that the battle was at an end, and John the Constable had taken the helmet from his head, when some of the men near him cried out. They were pointing at the river. From the forest on the far side long lines of Mongol horsemen were emerging.

CHAPTER X

CHOASPES MOVES

SUBOTAI THE EAGLE led these squadrons. He had summoned the best of the Horde, the mailed riders of the Merkit tribe and the black-clad Almalyk swordsmen—in all ten thousand—and had taken them at night into the forest, crossing the Kur unseen, fifty miles from the scene of the battle. He had followed gorges and cattle trails, sending scouts ahead to slay any herdsmen or villagers who might be in his path.

So his first squadrons had come up that morning to the heights overlooking the Kur and had descended cautiously, screened by the thick pine growth until they were within a few bowshots of the river.

The Georgians, who had seen the other portion of the Horde in front of them, had paid no attention to the far bank

of the Kur where there was no road. Even when Subotai's cavalry appeared they did not think the Mongols could cross the river ice.

But there had been many days of bitter cold, and the nomads who had roamed yearly the bleak lakes and frozen rivers of the steppes knew well enough when ice would bear them, and how it must be crossed. They deployed in long lines, a lance-length between riders and an arrow's flight between the ranks. They moved out upon the white surface of the river at a walk.

Nor did they hasten when the Georgians of the left flank raced to the bank. But their arrows began to whip the mass of hillmen, and when the first rank reached solid ground the shafts of the second rank flew over their heads, wreaking destruction among the Georgians. And above and below the Georgians the cavalry gained a footing unmolested, because the hillmen could not reach the bank in time.

Once across the Kur, the Mongols closed up into solid squadrons and trotted in upon the scattered clans. This time there was no withdrawing. When the arrow flight of a moving squadron swept a group of Georgians, men were cast down as if a blast of wind had struck them.

Their left flank was cut to pieces by arrows and ridden down, and John the Constable, hastening toward the river, ordered the center of his clans to face about.

"Form on the standards!" he cried as he galloped. "Hold your ground. Ax and shield!"

He sent riders to bid the Circassians withdraw and form again. But the Circassian cavalry never reached him. Only a scattering of the tribesmen came back to the standards. The rest, their horses wearied by plunging through the snow, and cut off by the first division of the Mongol's, fought desperately with simitars and began to flee toward the hills.

Of the young nobles who had surrounded Rusudan and who joined in the charge of the Circassians not one was seen alive again. The veteran Mongols, noticing the splendor of their kaftans and shining helms, slew them with arrows and lances.

Nor did the constable return to the knoll where Rusudan sat her horse, with pallid cheeks and tense lips.

The gray sky darkened, and the wind ceased. The mountain wall became a blur of shadow and mist. Twilight drew its veil over the scene. In this vast arena multitudes of shapes moved over the snow and the hoarse roaring of men, the neighing of horses and the clatter of steel stunned the princess of the Khaukesh.

"The real battle begins," said the crusader quietly.

He had been peering into the shadows, following movements of men unseen by the overwrought maid. He knew that the main body of Georgians, nearly twenty thousand strong, was holding its ground in a half-circle on three sides of them. And he saw where Mongol lancers were pushing around the left of this half-circle, seeking the rear of the constable's array.

Somewhere in the mass of the Horde, Subotai Bahadur sat his horse—man and beast garbed in black lacquer—peering into the obscurity with eyes that seemed to pierce the darkness. Colored lanterns of horn and paper, as large as barrels, hung on the points of long spears, transmitted his orders to his men.

When a lantern was raised or lowered or swung from side to side, a squadron leader somewhere in the groaning and shouting press of fighters commanded his drums to sound—and every rider of that squadron, hearing the roll of kettle-drums, pushed forward or freed himself from his foes to gallop to his comrades. And always Subotai shifted his squadrons farther and farther around the Georgians' flank—the dreaded *tulughma* or swoop that reached an enemy's rear.

"COME," said Hugh.

He reached out and took the girl's rein in his good hand.

It was the hour of darkness before moonrise, and the crusader, listening to the

tumult around them, thought that the Mongols had drawn farther away toward the hills. Little fighting was going on near them. In the distance were heard the shouts of the hillmen and the mutter of the drums of the Horde.

"Nay," Rusudan stirred and drew a deep breath, "I will not forsake the *mkhendruli*—the warriors."

"Faith," growled the crusader, "is there a man, save these few beside thee, that knows you are still on the field? Child, they would give their arms and heads to have you safe in Tphilis if they knew."

"I am not afraid."

"Come!" he said again, quietly.

She turned to peer into his eyes beneath the helmet peak. Then she spoke to the score of nobles and mounted squires who had remained at her side. They closed in around her with drawn weapons, and Hugh led Rusudan's Arab into the darkness.

Until now it would have been madness to try to escape toward Tphilis and, though the nearly frantic Georgians had urged her to fly to the hills behind them, she had not stirred. Now, there was no knowing what lay behind them. For an hour the valley of the Kur was like an arena with the lights turned down, the actors moving unseen.

One of the escort urged Rusudan to try to find a strong body of the Khaukesh clans, but she shook her head.

"Can they outpace such cavalry? Shall I burden them with fear? Nay, they might take us for pagans and loose javelins at us. I trust the Frank."

The horses, except Hugh's gray stallion, were fresh, and his charger was still able to gallop. Before starting, Hugh had thrust Rusudan's loose hair under her hood and had drawn the hood down about her eyes, so that the keen eyes of the Mongols might not recognize a woman—and for another reason.

They passed by knots of fallen men, and here and there a figure dragged itself through the trampled snow, moaning or crying for aid as the riders swept past. Wounded Georgians, who would watch jackals tear at the bodies of their comrades in the hours of that night.

Rusudan shivered, burying her face in her hands. Hugh, looking into the shadows ahead of them, swerved now to the right, now to the left. He could make out companies of Mongols who had dismounted to rest their ponies and wait until moonrise.

Again they plunged past warriors afoot, who sprang aside with lifted sword or ax, shouting hoarse defiance. When the horses slowed their pace and the snow surface loomed unbroken, Hugh thought they had passed beyond the Mongols.

Already the sky over the eastern ranges was filled with an orange glow; the moon would be shedding its lightinto the valley. The Georgians began to cast about for the road, whipping on their horses.

"Where the ground is dark, the road will be," said one of them to the princess. They stumbled into gullies and skirted thickets until they came to a ridge and what seemed a low growth of trees. But this dark blur was moving toward them.

"Stop!" Hugh whispered, and Rusudan reined in, her followers doing likewise.

From the dark patch came the creaking of saddles, the faint clicking of wooden bow-cases and the mutter of voices. Hugh felt that the girl was reaching for the simitar at her side.

The dark spot on the snow was a large party of Mongols, evidently a patrol, and they must have seen the Georgians.

"*Noyon!*" Hugh called out. "*Ordu orluk*—an officer of the marshal's regiment!"

The rattling of bow-cases ceased, and the patrol reined in.

"*Ahatou noyon!*" a deep voice made response.

The Mongols moved away, merging into the shadows under the ridge, and Rusudan shivered. When they reached the top of the ridge, Hugh put his charger to a gallop. They were on the road, and in a few moments the haystacks, topped with white cones, of the hamlet appeared, and then the village itself, clear in the moonlight.

IN THE road by the tavern that Hugh had passed in the morning stood a sleigh with four horses and a mounted escort. From the sleigh stepped a man in silvered mail, a scarlet cloak wrapped around his shoulders. He glanced at Hugh, and started when he beheld Rusudan's Arab.

"The princess! A golden candle to the good Saints Sergius and Bacchus! Her Highness will be pleased to dismount and avail herself of my sleigh."

Choaspes had come down the valley to watch events, and had lingered at the inn, loath to leave warmth and wine for the bitter cold. And the tidings he had gleaned of the battle had not inspired him to go on. He had traveled slowly, and his horses were fresh. The Georgians urged Rusudan to follow his advice.

"My Lord the *Strategos*!" she cried. "Have you word from—of—"

Her voice was choked by something like a sob, and Choaspes swept his hand around the deserted hamlet gravely. Fugitives were pushing past them. All the huts were dark.

But Rusudan would not move from the saddle until a Georgian officer galloped up on a staggering horse. He was without helmet or shield and his reins hung over his saddle-horn. He swayed from side to side as if drunk, and cursed when one of Choaspes' Greeks checked his horse.

"Woe to the sons of Karthlos! Woe! Broken are the clans—slain are the chieftains!"

"What of the constable?" cried Choaspes.

The wounded officer, unheeding, lashed his horse and plunged on, shouting over his shoulder:

"To Tphilis! Let him save himself who can."

And he was not lost to sight before warriors began to appear on the road and over the fields, lurching as they walked, their shoulders sagging—some pushing forward in silence, some shaking broken weapons at the cloudless sky. Beholding them, Choaspes took Rusudan's stirrup in his hand:

"Come, my lady. Time presses."

His followers were moving restlessly, climbing into their saddles and gazing down the valley into the haze of moonlight that might reveal the dreaded Mongol lancers at any moment. A contagion of fear was in the air. Moreover the Greek men-at-arms did not wish their horses to be seized by the fugitives.

Rusudan stirred and stretched her arms toward the figures that stumbled through the snow.

"My people!" she cried, her dark eyes tearless.

Long did Choaspes look into her face, no longer that of a mischievous girl, but of a woman who feels her helplessness and the pang of suffering.

"My lady," he said, with sudden purpose, "the arm of the most magnificent emperor is long and strong to aid. Come!"

Rusudan allowed him to help her from the saddle and to prepare a seat for her in the sleigh beside him. The drivers snapped their whips and the harness bells jangled. The Greek and Georgian riders closed in after it, and no one paid any heed to the crusader, who stood by his spent charger.

Once Hugh thought his name was called, but the sleigh and its escort gathered speed and soon vanished among the cottages. He put his hand on the heaving flank of the gray stallion and glanced at hanging muzzle, the bloodshot eyes.

"Eh, my brother," he said, "you must rest before we take the road."

He led the horse across the inn yard into the dark shed and loosened the girths. Then he searched until he found hay piled in a corner, and with a handful of this he rubbed down the horse, spreading a little under the foam-flecked muzzle. The charger had eaten all the snow that was good for him. Hugh threw a pair of saddle-cloths over his back and left him for a moment to enter the tavern, where candles still glowed on tables cluttered with black bread and joints of meat.

From the remnants of food Hugh cut

some morsels with his dagger and filled a bowl with wine from one of the kegs. He went back to the shed and sat down beside the horse. For a night and a day and part of another night he had not eaten. The ache of his wound made him so weak that it was an effort to put the bread between his teeth. When he had drunk a little wine, he set the bowl before the charger.

An hour later the horse, that had lifted one foot and was sniffing at the hay, tossed up his head and neighed. Hugh heard the clinking of bit-chains and the soft stamping of hoofs outside the inn.

He looked from the shed and saw a cavalcade of horsemen in the road, and recognized the white charger of the constable. The lord of Tphilis was examining a slender staff in his hand, an ivory staff tipped with a fragile gold crown, now trodden and broken.

Seeing this baton of Rusudan, the crusader approached and stood by the stirrup of the chieftain.

"The princess," he said, "hath taken the road for Tphilis with her attendants and the Roumis." *

When this was explained to the constable, he clasped his hands together gratefully and breathed deep. His steel-linked hauberk was ripped and slashed about the arms and shoulders and the winged crest was gone from his helmet.

"God did not give victory," he said.

The clansmen in the street, leaning on their spears or binding up cuts in arm and leg, heard him and answered.

"Eh, *thawad*, we will hold the castle. We will not be driven from behind walls!"

For a while the constable waited, mustering the men who flocked into the village, asking for tidings. Hugh heard that most of the Georgians had taken to the hills, where they had made an end of pursuit with their axes and javelins. The clans had been broken but not slaughtered. And these men around the constable showed no fear of pursuit, because they knew that experienced warriors guarded their rear. When a thousand had assembled in the hamlet the constable took the road to Tphilis.

The chieftain of the Khaukesh was of the breed of stubborn fighters who are more dangerous in retreat than in a charge, and Hugh understood why the Moslems had never won to Tphilis.

"Will they attack the city, think ye?" the constable asked the crusader.

"Aye, if it lies in their road. Otherwise they will not waste men. They are picked warriors and they mean to pass beyond the Khaukesh."

To this the constable made no answer. It seemed to him that the Mongols must desire the sack of Tphilis and, besides, he did not see where else they would go.

And Hugh in his turn asked a question—

"The princess—will she seek safety in the cities of the emperor?"

"Nay, she is of the hills—the *daghestan*. If need be, she will be safe there."

And the chieftain pointed up at the forested heights outlined in the red glow of the setting moon.

But it did not happen as he had foretold. Within an hour the mass of warriors ahead of them parted and an armed peasant galloped up to the constable, reining in and casting himself on his knees at a distance.

"Ivan Vartabad," he cried out, "terror has come to the castle!"

"How?"

"*Akh*, it is not to be known how. Men lie lifeless in the western gate as if wolves had got in."

All the Georgians within hearing stopped and held their breath, while John the Constable asked whether the castle was lost. Had the pagans reached it?

"Impossible that they should have reached it," groaned the peasant, holding his head. "They were not seen in the town. But there are many dead in the western gate—*aznaurs* and Roumi swordsmen. Grigol of Thor hath his skull split—"

"Rusudan—what of her?"

"With my eyes I saw the daughter of Karthlos ride up the ramp into the court

* The Greeks.

at the hour when the moonlight passes from the dome of the Malaki. Now only God knows where she has gone, because the eyes of men can not see her."

The constable gripped short his reins, and the peasant sprang aside when the white horse plunged forward.

"In the name of the Father and Son, make way!"

CHAPTER XI

THE TRAIL OF THE HORDE

IT WAS high noon before the fate of Rusudan was known. The castellan who lay, as the peasant had said, in the courtyard with his head split open by a sword, could tell nothing, and those within the castle were certain of only one thing: The princess had come to the ramp in Choaspes' sleigh, and had walked through the barbican gate with the *strategos* and his followers. In the courtyard there had been talk, and suddenly the clatter of steel. In that hour before dawn the place had been in darkness, and the frightened servants had seen lanthorns moving about swiftly, and the horses led from the stables. Some one had shouted for the western gate to be opened.

But Rupen of Kag, who had been listening at his window, knew the truth. Choaspes had insisted that Rusudan go with him beyond Tphilis and seek sanctuary in Trebizond, and she had refused. Then the Greeks had overpowered her few attendants and had led out every good horse from the stables. At the western gate they had met Grigol of Thor, the castellan, who had mustered a few men-at-arms when he heard the clash of weapons. Evidently the Greeks, who were in full mail, had ridden down the Georgians and had escaped from the hill of Tphilis before dawn. They had carried off Rusudan.

The wearied men who mustered around John the Constable took up pursuit, finding horses where they could. Shotha Kupri went off to rouse other bands in the forest.

They came back late that night with sagging shoulders and scowling brows. They had not gained even a sight of the Greeks. Whether he had planned this move beforehand, or had taken measures for his own safety, the *strategos* had collected relays of fresh horses twenty miles from Tphilis, and would be nearing the gates of Trebizond within the lines of the empire before the hillmen could overtake him. Nevertheless, Shotha Kupri had pushed on with some Gipsies.

The constable and the few surviving chieftains could not leave the castle, because the Mongols might move against him any hour. Scouts from the forest reported that the Horde had gone into camp in the very hamlet where the Georgians had been quartered before the battle. And the remnants of the clans were drifting into Tphilis with their families and what cattle and sheep they were able to drive off.

On the following day Mongol patrols advanced as far as the chapel in the firs and scanned the walls of Tphilis. The constable labored ceaselessly and without sleep, and the Georgians doggedly set to work carrying sheaves of arrows to the walls and making ready the cressets for lighting—if the attack should come at night. Not a man from the Kur to the castle keep who would not have given his life to have Rusudan safe among the clans. They knew that if she could be brought back, Shotha Kupri would manage it.

"Nay," said the *mkhendruli* now and again, "the emperor has pledged aid. It can not be that *he* will permit harm to come to the daughter of the Karthlos."

"And yet," some responded, "the Greeks went against Grigol of Thor with edged steel."

They shook their heads and hastened to new labors. It was the first time that a ruler, or the child of a ruler, of the Khaukesh had left the mountains. The noblewomen of Tphilis prayed hourly in the Malaki, and the chieftains sat with weapons in their hands.

At the end of the week the Mongols had

not come, but Shotha Kupri appeared in the hall of the keep where the *thawads* sat at meat.

One glance at him, and some groaned, others took their heads in their hands.

"The Ronmis are beyond the hills," said Shotha Kupri.

"The Princess?" demanded John the Constable.

"With them, bound to a sleigh. From the *strategos*, a letter." Shotha Kupri held out a roll of parchment that the lord of Tphilis opened eagerly. It was in Greek, written on the back of a leaf torn from some priest's manuscript, and he gave it to the old metropolitan to read.

Paul—he of the white hair and the gold-embroidered cope, who was head of the church in Armenia—read the missive through swiftly, because it was Greek written by a skilled hand. But for a moment he fingered his beard, saying nothing.

" 'Tis addressed to Ivan," he explained, "and the message is—secret."

The constable, who had been striding back and forth behind the patriarch's chair, halted as if pricked by steel.

"Read! I have no secrets."

Paul inclined his head.

> "*Choaspes, Strategos of Anatolia, to John Lord of Tphilis and high Constable of Georgia—greeting. This is a time of trouble, and they who are wise will not lack fortune at the end. Thy name hath been extolled by friends at the court of the Eternal Emperor. Favor will be shown the Keeper of the Gate. The girl Rusudan, last of the Lasha lineage, is more fitted for a camp of vagabonds than a throne. Under the care of the Eternal Emperor she will meet no harm. Meanwhile a strong hand is needed in the Khaukesh. Drive out the barbarians and thou wilt earn a reward greater than that given the conqueror of Mithridates, the Parthian.*"

"In God's name," cried the constable, "what means this?"

The patriarch sighed and mused a while.

"My son, the message was to thee."

"A hundred devils! Little skilled am I in statecraft or the writing of missives. To my mind, Choaspes tries to draw a bough over his tracks."

"More, Ivan. He promises more. He has carried the princess of the royal line from her people. Perhaps he will hold her hostage. Surely we must send emissaries to the *monocrator*, the emperor."

Shotha Kupri, who had been standing in silence, lifted his hand.

"Long have we served the Cæsars of Constantinople. We have bowed to them and sent our sons to man the legions. We have held the Gate. The emperor sent the Genoese, and we guarded their caravans. What was our reward? The Iberian* and Circassian girls were taken not seldom and sold as slaves, not only to Greeks but to dog-believing Muhammadans. Now the Greeks have taken Rusudan. It will not avail to appeal to the emperor. I say, 'Go with naked swords.' "

"Aye!" cried the brother of Grigol.

"Shotha Kupri hath said well," echoed others, nodding eagerly.

But John the Constable smote the head of the ax in his belt.

"Then tell me—who is to go? Where are the chieftains who will journey to the Chersonese with swords, and leave the hamlets and the women to the pagans?"

There was silence at this, and a muttering of rage at their helplessness.

"The Greeks would have made you king," cried the eldest of the Orphelians.

"Choaspes has tricked us with words," responded John the Constable, his brow darkening. "Eh, he is wiser than we. Did he not bid us to move down against the Horde?"

"And you added your word, John of Tphilis. Now the wolves of the Kur are coming down from the timber to gorge themselves on the bodies of the *mkhendruli*. They will lack graves, our brothers."

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*In the days of the older Roman empire the Georgians were called Iberians.

At this they glared, one at another, remembering old feuds. The missive sent by Choaspes had been a brand that kindled suspicion and resentment among these men who had seen their kindred slain not many days since. Choaspes might have thought that the constable could be tempted, or perhaps he could not refrain from mocking the chieftains.

The patriarch lifted both hands to quiet them, but John of Tphilis stretched out his bare right arm on which were wounds still unhealed and undressed.

"Is that the hand of a traitor, my brothers?"

Shotha Kupri stepped to the table, broad and surly as a scarred boar with broken tusks.

"By the cross of Ani, you have held the standard with a firm hand! Traitor you are not, nor can the written words of Choaspes make you otherwise. Because the Greek dared not stand before us and say with his lips what he hath written down. Did he take his weapon in hand in the snows of the Kur? He did not, and that is the truth. Now let one who is wise say how we are to rescue Rusudan!"

They all looked at the patriarch, but he shook his head moodily, his veined fingers rubbing uncertainly at a spot on his *mantya.*

"We can not leave the walls," muttered one of the Orphelians.

"If we could," added the constable grimly, "what then? There are two roads to the cities of the Greeks—one from Trebizond and the ships of the Great Sea. But the ships are manned by Greeks and Genoese. The other, by the northern passes through the steppes of the Alans and the Kumanians—"

"They are foster brothers of the Mongols," growled Shotha Kupri. "Aye, and kin to all the devils."

"We can not open a road, that is clear," nodded the Orphelian. "We must trust in cunning, like a fox."

And they turned again hopefully to the patriarch, who sighed and clasped his hands.

"There is no gift but from the Almighty. Pray ye to Him who is greater than the emperor."

"For the ages of ages," muttered Shotha Kupri. "Yet, as for cunning, a lamb will suckle a lioness before a Georgian will overmatch a Greek in cunning."

And John the Constable gripped the parchment between his fingers, tearing it into fragments and casting them into the fire.

Though they talked until the most weary let their heads fall in slumber on the table, they could not think of a way to reach Rusudan. Calamity had come upon the Khaukesh—first the Mongols, then the loss of their princess. Unwonted things were happening, and they were troubled.

They were utterly astonished when Avak the shepherd ran into the hall the next day with word that the Horde was moving. But not upon Tphilis. He had watched from the forest across the Kur, and the riders of the Horde had been crossing on the ice, driving the herds of cattle and captured horses.

He had waited until he saw the first detachments enter the foothills. The Mongols were heading toward the north and the unknown steppes.

It was several days before the Georgians would venture out of Tphilis. Having been tricked once by a feigned retreat, they feared the empty valley as much as the camp of the Horde.

THAT day Hugh came before the council of the princes. He wore full mail, and some of the chieftains noticed that the falcon tablet was hung around his throat. They looked at him with attention and more than a little respect.

Shotha Kupri had taken his part, and they had heard that he had brought Rusudan safely from the battlefield of the Kur. If Rupen, who had been crippled by the crusader's ax, had no blame for the wanderer, they bore him no ill-will.

Rabban Simeon had been talking to the Armenian merchants, and it was rumored that the emperor of the Greeks had offered five thousand pieces of gold for the

head of the Frank. Since the flight of the *strategos* feeling had been bitter against the Greeks.

"He came to us from the pagans," Shotha Kupri declared, "and he bore himself boldly. He warned us of calamity, and it happened as he had said. It is clear that he is no spy, but a man who has seen more than one battle. He knows his own road. Let him go and come as he chooses."

Now Hugh greeted them, and asked leave of the constable to go from Tphilis.

"Whither?" the chieftains demanded.

"To the Chersonese."

Bethinking them of the five thousand pieces of gold, they mused awhile. If the Frank wished to put himself within reach of the executioner of the emperor, that was his affair, not theirs.

"It was said in the castle," remarked the constable, "that you have sworn an oath of fellowship with the lords of Cathay. Is that true?"

"True."

"And you will go to the court of Theodore Lascaris the emperor as an envoy?"

"Nay."

"Well, you are free." John of Tphilis nodded and pulled at his mustache. "Eh, Sir Hugh, we would well that you abide with us. Here you will not lack for bread and meat and wine."

"For your courtesy, my Lord," Hugh made answer, "I thank you. But I have far to go."

That day he rode from the western gate of the citadel, Shotha Kupri escorting him as far as the edge of the forest before turning back.

"Go with God, Sir Hugh. Remember that the merchant Trevisani may be in Trebizond, and he is no friend to you."

Hugh smiled, looking down the narrow track that ran through the forest mesh.

"Nay, I have few friends, Lord Prince. But I have the sword Durandal, and that will serve me well."

Shotha Kupri watched the crusader until he was lost to sight around a turn in the trail; then he sought Rupen and found the ax-man sitting by the door of Rusudan's vacant chambers.

"Eh," said the master of Kag slowly, "the Frank came many times to share a cup with me. It is clear to me why he fares forth to the Chersonese."

Shotha Kupri considered this in silence.

"The Father and Son know," went on Rupen, "that I held Rusudan dearer than life. Messer Antonio tricked me with words so that I challenged the Frank, and he struck me down. Choaspes sought her, hiding his desire from all eyes, because he was clever and wary as a fox."

"May the fiends tear him!"

"Satan will not fail to greet him, if the Frank comes within sword's reach of him."

"Choaspes has power from Satan himself."

"That may be, but the Frank would dare twist the devil's tail. Much is clear to me that is dark to you. From the hour that his eyes beheld her the Frank loved Rusudan."

Shotha Kupri looked up in surprize.

"Eh—he gave no sign."

"Because it was a torture to him that he was bound to serve the Horde."

"And now?"

"Since Choaspes carried off Rusudan, the Frank hath spoken no word. He walked the battlement between the towers and of nights he paced his chamber. At first he tried swinging the long sword to test his strength; then he would exercise the stallion down by the river. Wisely he waited until he was fit for the *khoda*—to take the trail. When that day came, he went. He will rescue Rusudan or—take vengeance."

This thought filled both the hillmen with grim satisfaction that lasted until Avak who had been watching in the heights sought Shotha Kupri and told a strange tale.

Avak had sallied forth with his dog and had taken the road chosen by Sir Hugh. He had followed the knight's tracks to the place where Shotha Kupri had turned back. A league or so beyond, the tracks

of the stallion left the trail and entered the forest.

This had puzzled the shepherd because the road was too plain to lose and there were no signs of wolves. The tracks wound through the timber and dropped into a gorge that led north. Avak followed the trail and found himself ascending toward the distant summit of Kasbek.

Here other tracks joined the prints of the stallion's hoofs—a half dozen ponies, evidently with riders. The shepherd made a circle and picked up the trail of the riders, tracing it up to a camp in a stand of firs overlooking Tphilis.

He was certain that the six horsemen were Mongols because there were broken arrows and *kumis* sacks around the ashes of the fire. So he went back to the place where the Mongols had intercepted the crusader. He found where they had halted the first night, and it seemed to him that the stallion had been tethered with the other horses.

A few leagues to the north the tracks of the seven riders entered the broad trail of the Horde, where in the multitude of marks of cattle, men and carts Avak had lost all trace of the seven riders.

"Beyond doubt," he insisted, "they followed the Horde."

It seemed to Rupen and Shotha Kupri that the crusader had lied to them, because he had turned from the Trebizond road to go after the Mongols. A patrol left behind to watch the Georgians had picked him up by agreement or by chance. They remembered that strange lights had been seen in that portion of the hills after darkness, and Shotha Kupri thought of the lanterns used as signals by the Mongols in the battle of the Kur.

But more than this they did not learn, because the Gate was closed and the paths of the Khaukesh were impassable to men for a time. The spring thaw was setting in. The ice began to go out of the rivers and a rush of muddy waters filled the valleys. The streams fed by melting snow during the hours of day roared and swirled down from the heights.

Only at night could these streams be crossed, and even then the soft snow afforded treacherous footing. Except for the hunters and the *abreks* who went out, like Avak, to look for stray cattle, the Georgians remained shut up in their hamlets, and no word reached them from the outer world.

CHAPTER XII

THE WILL OF THE EAGLE

"AND what," asked Arslan, "shall I say to Subotai Bahadur?"

The little Mongol looked more like a Turk than ever, because he had managed to plunder a Bokharian's horse caravan and had taken for himself a red-and-green-striped *khalat*, shagreen boots, and a turban of sheer blue silk sewn with pearls. Moreover the lot of a patrol leader suited him well. He had killed a sheep every day and had dined off the fat of the tails until his broad cheeks were puffed out like puddings. He had worn the turban because he fancied himself in it, and had thrown away his peaked cap with the sable edge, but since the mysteries of turban winding as done by an orthodox Muhammadan horse thief were quite beyond his understanding, the blue silk headgear looked more like a pavilion wrecked by a storm than anything else.

"What order was given?" Hugh inquired.

Arslan counted off on his fingers that were rank of grease and mutton.

"One—to watch for pursuit and bring word of it. Two—not to lose any horses. I have three times the number given me. Three—not to get drunk. There were wineskins in that *karwan*, and after we had emptied all the skins we rode through the forest with torches and shouted, but took no harm. Four—to look steadfastly for you and bring you direct to the Eagle."

"Then you have obeyed all of the order but one part. I saw the light of the torches the night you were—" Hugh smiled—"drinking."

"But without harm, O Swooping Hawk. We *all* woke up in the *yurta*, and groomed the ponies the next day."

"Still, the order was not to get drunk."

"*Aya tak.* Thus it was. And yet he who gave the order did not know there would be wineskins."

"It would be better not to mention the wine."

"Much better. But Subotai Bahadur will be glad because I am bringing you. He thought you were vanished, like a stone cast into deep water. It may be in his mind to bind your arms and set you on a stake or wind you with straw and light you as a torch at night. How should I know?"

Hugh still smiled, but his eyes were thoughtful.

"Tell to Subotai Bahadur the truth—that I sought your camp and came back to the Horde of my own will."

"That is truth."

Although the trail of the Mongols was broad and clear it was by no means easy to follow. Arslan and the crusader had to descend deep gullies that the cavalry had crossed by bridges of timber that were taken up and carried in sleds, to be used over again. For days they skirted the mighty shoulders of Kasbek, working up into higher altitudes where the vultures flapped away from the carcasses of cattle that had died by the way.

And before they were abreast the summit of Kasbek, hidden in its mists, they were forced to leave the trail and take shelter up the slope. Here in a broad valley the wild tribes of Circassians of Kasbek and the Alans had beset the Horde and had been driven off. But bands of horsemen were combing over the field, as hornets buzz around a broken hive.

If Arslan and Hugh had been seen they would have been hunted down without mercy. They hid in the timber. Arslan could not resist bringing in some stray horses that wandered too near their covert. It seemed to Hugh as if the Mongol could never get horses enough.

Still, the growing herd served a doubly useful purpose. They mounted after nightfall and rode boldly along the valley floor. More than once they were hailed by the hillmen, and Arslan answered readily.

The dispatch rider of the *Kha Khan* had the gift of tongues and he knew many of the strange dialects which were spoken between the Khaukesh and Samarkand. In whatever speech he was hailed he made shift to answer with oaths that made his companions chuckle. To one who shouted from a fire, he cried:

"A sheep stealer is bold after a battle, but *we* ride Mongol ponies. Come and look!"

A ragged hillman sprang up and stood shading his eyes from the glare of the fire. Evidently he counted the warriors with Arslan, and made out the flaming turban and *khalat*, for he answered surlily:

" 'Tis the dog-born dog from Bokhara, the lifter of horses who sells to the Roumis."

Though this would have brought a true Bokharian out of his saddle, sword in fist, Arslan contented himself with a parting shot.

"There is loot in the dunghills for such as thee!"

Whoever sat around that fire and heard him must have thought he had other men within call or had other reasons for his boldness. Arslan passed without being attacked, well pleased with himself, though he would have liked a fight better.

"Come," he said then, "we waste time."

His idea of a good pace was to go at a free gallop, singing and snapping his whip. Occasionally he would call a halt to change saddles to fresher beasts and to cast around for tracks. Whether he guided himself by the stars or had an animal's instinct for sniffing out the road, Hugh never knew. The crusader's wounds were troubling him in the damp night air, but he did not ask the Mongols to rein in, and by the time the crescent moon was out of sight he saw they were on the track of the Horde again.

When the sun forced its way into the

gorges and the steady *drip-drip* began from the forest growth, Arslan saw no reason to halt. He said he was tired of hiding out and wanted to be able to sleep all day in the saddle and hear the news of the world that reached Subotai's division from the dispatch riders of the *Kha Khan*.

AT THE last of the northern passes they came up with the standard of the Horde. Subotai was kneeling on a tiger-skin in the snow, gazing with satis-satisfaction on the scene below him. Behind him, his officers were silent. One held the rein of his black charger; another his sword.

"This is the true Gate," said Subotai at length, and they assented.

But the voices were barely heard, because on their left hand a swollen river roared over a series of falls, and the spray rising above it formed a deep rainbow that stretched from cliff to cliff of the gorge. Under the arch in the sky could be seen, thousands of feet below, the unbroken green of the northern plain.

But it was the pass itself that filled the Mongols with awe. The red rock walls rose in serried columns, pillars of basalt, shot through with gleaming porphyry.

In all the pass grew no trees or shrubs. From five to eight thousand feet above their heads the tips of the gigantic colonnade seemed to brush the clouds. And the howling of wind in the spaces above mingled with the reverberation of the falls.*

Beside the river a line of riders was making its way slowly down, following the precarious path from ledge to ledge. And the warriors who were waiting their turn to descend looked about uneasily, believing that this colonnade of stone had been fashioned by giants and that the tumult of the falls was an angry voice threatening them.

"There is a writing on the stone behind the *Orluk*," said one.

Subotai had chosen to seat himself in the break of a ruined wall, his curiosity aroused by lines of granite blocks and fallen pillars nearly covered with rubble and the débris of the cliff. He had asked the Cathayan and the Syrian *rabbans* to read the inscription in the rock, but they had not been able to do so.

"This was once a *kurgan*," † said Subotai without hesitation, "and the man who built it knew his business. See, it commands the road."

"Still, there be *rakchas* in this place," murmured a noble of Cathay. "Surely there are devils."

The creaking of the carts, the snapping of whips and the bellowing of the remnants of the cattle—all these were caught up and echoed back and forth between the cliffs. A horse neighed and the rocks screamed and whined again until the sound dwindled away to a whisper among the crags. The Mongols glanced upward and shuddered. Thunder and echoes were the two things they feared on God's earth.

Probably if Subotai had ordered the kettledrums sounded the drummers would have obeyed, but they were praying that the Eagle might not give such an order.

Subotai, impervious to devils, glanced at the throng of prisoners and grunted softly. In front of the ruins the courier Arslan was standing, and by him the crusader.

"*Hai!*" Subotai's green eyes gleamed. "What word do you bring?"

Arslan advanced, touched his forehead, lips and breast, and pointed to the small herd guarded by his men.

"The Georgians do not stir. I have many horses."

"They are yours. What of the Swooping Hawk?"

"He came to us with one horse. He was wounded."

When Subotai nodded for him to approach, Hugh came forward, conscious of the exclamations of the officers.

"Where is the chieftain of Almalyk? Where is Gutchluk?"

"Slain," Hugh responded briefly, his eyes intent on the broad face of the Mongol, terrible with anger.

*This must have been the pass of Dariel, called by the Romans the Caucasian Gate, or Iberian Gate.

†Fort.

"And you live! *Hough!* You will join them in the shadowland. You will be cast into the rushing water and after this hour you will cease to be."

"If that is your will." Hugh was aware of warriors moving toward him from behind, and he knew better than to touch his sword. "But we have poured water on our swords, Subotai."

Instead of answering, the Mongol ground his teeth and rocked on his hips, the red hairs of his thin mustache bristling over his blue lips.

"*Hough!* I sent ten thousand Georgians out of the world. They will remember that they cut off the heads of my envoys. We came among them as wolves among sheep. Now—"

Hugh spoke suddenly, pointing his finger at the Mongol, who was working himself into a murderous rage.

"Have you forgotten the order of the *Kha Khan?*"

Sheer surprize at the interruption kept Subotai silent, though the veins in his temples began to throb.

"The order was that you should go to the western world," Hugh went on.

"Speak!"

"You have turned your reins to the north."

"Aye, to avoid the great water, the sea. We can not go upon the sea. I will find the road again, though dust storms rise and magicians make their veils in the air." *

"But you can not find your way to the Golden Chersonese, which is the city of the emperor, because it lies between land and the great water."

For a moment Subotai pondered this, remembering that the captive tribesmen had been able to tell him nothing of this rich city—at least they had all told him different tales, vainly hoping their lives would be spared. Hugh, watching him with every faculty alert, interrupted his meditation.

"Have you seen the Sign?"

Subotai glanced at the rainbow and at the crusader inquiringly. Hugh was pointing at the block of granite upon which the lettering was carved.

"What says the Sign?" the Orluk asked, moved by irresistible curiosity.

The officers, who had been hanging on the words, sat down to listen the better. Hugh could not read the half-effaced inscription, but he knew it must be Latin by the form of the letters.

"The meaning of the Sign is that a stronghold of Rome stood here in other days."

Subotai contemplated the débris that nearly covered the ruins and grunted.

"Is there much gold in the Chersonese? How much?"

"A hundred camels could not carry it away, nor a hundred men the precious stones."

"*Kai!* I have seen more than that. Some men say the Chersonese is a castle and a garden built at the end of a neck of land running into the sea. Across the neck is a wall. Do they lie?"

"It is so."

"And in the sea around the castle are *yurtas* that float on the water and carry men about."

"Aye, ships."

"We would break our teeth on the wall and the *yurtas* of the sea would carry the Greeks away before we entered the castle."

Hugh smiled, because he knew that Subotai had been questioning captives, that he longed to take the city of the emperor.

"Once," he said, "Subotai Bahadur told me the strength of a wall is not in the thickness of its stone but in the men that defend it. I know the emperor and his hired soldiery."

Once more curiosity quenched the anger of the Mongol.

"Speak!"

"There is a way to carry the wall that bars the Chersonese from the land—aye, though the wall be high as four lances—and to ride in among the Greeks before they can flee in their galleys. Not ten men of the Horde would die."

Subotai, with another Mongol general,

*Mirages. The Mongols were acquainted with this phenomenon in the Gobi, and knew it for illusion, attributing it to the arts of magicians.

had forced his way through the great wall of Cathay by a stratagem. Now his eyes gleamed.

"What is your plan, O Swooping Hawk?"

It was the first time he had addressed the crusader by his Mongol name, and Hugh answered boldly.

"Give me Arslan and a ten of warriors. I will fare to the Chersonese and when the hour comes the gate in the wall will be opened. It would be your part to approach unseen at night with a *tuman*."

"How will you seize the gate?"

Hugh folded his arms on the handguard of Durandal, outwardly calm enough, though he was strung to feverish tension within.

"If Subotai Bahadur has given command to put me to death, I can do nothing."

"I have not given the order." For a moment the Mongol looked at the crusader without blinking, and men heard again the roar of the falls and the overtones of the echoes. "A devil is in you! Before, in the valley of the Khaukesh, you were like a man hesitating between two roads. Now you are like a rider who grips the saddle and looks far ahead."

"Aye." Hugh laughed deep in his throat. "The way is clear."

"Good. Then tell me the plan."

"Where many listen it is not good to talk."

Subotai grunted impatiently and motioned his followers away. Hugh squatted down beside him, smoothing a place in the snow and drawing upon it with his dagger-point while he talked. The Mongol rested his hands on his knees and bent his head to see the better. He seemed not to notice that his companion had drawn steel within arm's reach.

When Hugh had done, the dagger still rested in his fingers, and Subotai meditated for the time that water takes to boil.

"You have many foes in the Chersonese," he muttered, pulling at his mustache.

"So may you be certain that the gate will be opened."

Again Hugh laughed under his breath. He knew the strength of the Chersonese, where a suspicion-ridden emperor exiled himself to be safe from attack. The Horde might break through such defenses, but it was no light thing to invoke the power of the Horde. The Moslems called it the scourge sent by God. Somewhere in the Chersonese he would find Rusudan.

He knew that Subotai wished him no ill. The fate of the Mongol envoys slain by the Georgians would be fresh in Subotai's mind, and there was no knowing how the Eagle might choose to satisfy his anger upon the crusader. If Subotai refused his advice it would be because the Mongol suspected him, and if so, there was no least doubt what would happen.

Suddenly Subotai struck his gnarled hands together.

"*Kai!* There is surely a devil in you, Swooping Hawk. I wished to learn your plan so that the way would be open to me. Now I see that, alone among the Horde, you can open the portal of the Chersonese." And he uttered the phrase that pardoned an offender against Mongol law, "You are without blame."

Hugh sighed from the depths of his body and slipped the dagger back into its sheath.

"Would you have stabbed me if I had said otherwise?" the old Mongol asked suddenly.

"I would have held the knife to your throat and tried to escape."

This amused Subotai mightily, because he threw back his head and chuckled, all the wrinkles in his bronze face coming to life.

"Oho-ho-o! The cub would spring at the lion."

Without the slightest stiffening of muscles or sign of what he was about to do, his left hand shot out and closed Hugh's right forearm. Before the crusader could tighten his muscles against the pressure the iron fingers of the old warrior were grinding the steel rings into his flesh, twisting the sinews and making the bones move in their sockets.

"Thus," he said, "it would have been."

The swift action roused him and put him in a pleasant mood.

"We will ride to the Chersonese, you and I. I will see that long sword at its work. We have been sitting too long like women milking camels." He stood up and roared an order. "*Tugh!*"

The standard pole with its nine ox-tails was raised, and his horse led forward. The Mongol drummers, with a desperate glance skyward, sounded the long roll that was the summons for the officers to come to their commands.

"But I will give no more than ten men," Subotai muttered. "They who are sent with you do not come back."

THE Horde advanced into the northern steppe, leaving the snow and descending into the shallow valleys, scarred and flooded with the freshets. It entered a wilderness of fruit-trees in bloom, of lush grass and abundant game. And the horses, thinned by a winter in the mountains, began to grow round-bellied.

The herders sang once more as they rode around the mass of horses at night; hunters went out from every regiment and came back with bear, deer and even some of the wild buffalo that ranged the fringe of the Khaukesh and seemed to the Mongols to be the cousins of the yak of Tibet.

Here in the open plain the riders were at home. They scattered in groups of two or three thousand so the animals would have good grazing, and they guided themselves by the stars until the advanced scouts rode in to report a multitude of tribes assembling to meet them.*

Then couriers were sent to the scattered units of the Horde, and the *tumans* formed for battle. Subotai learned that the new foes were Alans—he called them Aärs—and Kumanians, nomads like themselves who had drifted out of Central Asia in past ages, but softened by the milder life of the southern steppes.

THESE same steppes had grown brown. The fierce winds of midsummer whipped the feather-grass and tumbleweed, the black earth was cracked and coated with powder-like dust, before word of this battle reached the outposts of the Greek empire. Then it was whispered that the Mongols had crushed the stalwart Alans and had driven off the wild Kumanians as hawks drive quail apart.

Some of the Kumanians had fled to the Russian dukes, and the host of the Slavs was mustering to stem the Mongol advance with its swords.

On the whole, this news was pleasing to the emperor, who had long been troubled by the raids of the Kumanians and the half-pagan Slavs. And as time went on, with no further word from the steppes, he felt certain that the invaders from Cathay had been hurled back or so decimated by fighting that they had withdrawn into the barrens from which they had come.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MOST MAGNIFICENT

THEODORE LASCARIS, the Comnenus, the Augustus of the world and inheritor of the last of the realm of Constantine, had been greatly cheered by the visit of his Arab physician that day. Although there were skilled doctors among the Greeks in the palace, Lascaris trusted the disciple of Avicenna more than his countrymen. And the Arab *hakim* had told him that the fever had left him. The long illness that had kept him on his couch for nearly a year would soon be at an end.

"*Ehu!*" The emperor raised himself weakly on his arm. "Three hundred gilt candles I vow to Hagia Sophia. Eh, Rusudan?"

The girl who sat among the slaves bent her head. Her hands moved over the embroidery stretched on its sandalwood frame.

*It is singular but true that these Alans and Kumanians, who had heard that the Mongols were invading the west, expected them to come across the open steppe north of the Caspian, and were taken utterly by surprize when the Horde emerged from the passes of the Caucasus behind them. Except the host of Tamerlane, no other army made the circuit of the Caspian, and until the Russians cut down the forest of the Caucasus and bridged the rivers, no military unit ever passed the Caucasus.

"What sayest thou, Rusudan?"

"God gives."

"Aye—aye." Lascaris crossed himself hastily on forehead and breast. "Exalted be His name for the ages. But the worthy Saracen is a truth-speaker. Recovery is sure."

Rusudan bent lower her dark head so that the sick man could not read her face though he tried. The other women, who were not allowed to divert themselves with embroidery when they were in attendance on the emperor, whispered among themselves.

"Bring me wine—a little, cooled by snow—Rusudan."

The supple hands of the Georgian ceased their task, and she stuck the needle upright in the cloth, rising to go to an inner chamber where the chief of the eunuchs sat. She returned with a goblet of Venetian glass and knelt by the couch of the sick man.

"Taste!" he ordered.

As she had done many times before, she sipped a little of the wine and held the goblet so that Lascaris could watch her face until he was satisfied the wine had no poison dissolved in it. He could see her very clearly because it was near the hour of vespers when the sun, sinking into the sea, filled the long gallery of the palace with a ruddy glow.

Even the carpet, woven by the silk looms of Persia, was tinged by this glow, likewise the heavy canopy of Tyrian purple over the couch. The head of Lascaris, bloodless in its pallor, was faintly flushed. The skin lay in folds under his eyes and his thin mouth showed no lips at all; the flesh had fallen away from the bone so much that the aspect was that of a skull, for his hair had been clipped close.

"Eh, Rusudan," he murmured, "thou dost hate me, without doubt. A self-willed barbarian, an unwilling captive and a scornful attendant. Thou hast mocked the worthy *strategos* until I do believe he was moved to make thee a gift to me. I bear with thee because no one would give thee gold to do harm to me."

The downcast eyes of the girl gleamed resentfully.

"A daughter of the Lashas accepts no reward for service."

"Then surely the Lashas are descended from Olympus! Hmm. The eunuchs all complain of thee for good reason, I doubt not."

Something like a smile wrinkled his lips. Rusudan had all but knifed to death an Egyptian eunuch who had tried to punish her. The incident delighted Lascaris, though he had the dagger taken from her.

And he noticed that the Arab physician talked with her, but would not speak to the slave-girls.

"Many Lashas have died in defense of the Lord emperor," she made answer quietly.

He motioned for her to give him the goblet, and drank slowly, taking no heed, apparently, of her words. Lascaris was resourceful and utterly merciless, and these qualities had kept him safe from assassination for twelve years. Even his distant cousins, the Comneni of Sinope and Trebizond feared him, though he did not doubt they plotted against him. As for Choaspes, he fancied the *strategos* of the Khaukesh was too indolent to be unpleasantly ambitious and, besides, had been absent a long time from the court.

His informers reported that Choaspes did nothing but hold revels in his galley and row from villa to villa along the coast, squandering money among his intimates.

"Yet Choaspes," he remarked suddenly, "is not wont to give away anything he cherishes."

He leaned back on the mass of cushions considering her. A girl, innocent still, too slender for perfect proportion—too wide in the lips and chin for perfect beauty—her dark tresses contrasting charmingly with her fair skin; too impulsive to hide her likes and dislikes, and inclined to weep when she was alone, though not before others. She had nursed him faithfully, and understood the Arab's instructions easily.

And when she sang she could drive

away this weariness that came on the heels of the fever.

"Take thy cithara, Rusudan," he said, "and sing."

Obediently the girl put away the goblet and picked up the instrument, seating herself on the threshold of the balcony at a distance from the couch. Her clear young voice soared within the chamber, rising to the dome of mosaic-work that pictured angels grouped under a gold cross.

"Arg, my falcon, is quick to see
Quest and quarry and fly back to me—"

The Greek slaves, trained to the lute and to gentler harmony, fidgeted and smiled, wishing to show their disapproval, but Lascaris relished the savage undertone of the gipsy song.

Many times had Rusudan repeated the song, and when she had finished she half closed her eyes, leaning her head against the marble pillar, thinking of anything but the whispering women and the glow of sunset on the yellow marble. It was months since she had quieted Hugh in his fever with that same song.

As she meditated she was aware of another singer, a man with a lusty voice, and none too sensitive an ear. For a while she could not catch the words; then she remembered that it was an Arabian air, and one she knew very well, though the singer improvised the words.

"Ask for the stars,
O Miriam!
I will pluck them for thee,
For Miriam."

Some of the Greek slaves heard it too, and went out on the balcony to look down at the sea.

"It is the young Bokharian," one of them whispered.

"The slave dealer?"

"He rows all around the quays and even dares come near the palace itself. Hark to him!"

"Ask not the moon,
Sweet Miriam,
For that I have pledged—
To Zuleika!"

When the other women had gone in, Rusudan stood up, tossed the dark mass of her hair back from her throat and sauntered out on the balcony as if seeking the cool air that came off the sea in the evening.

A hundred feet below her a small barge rowed by negroes was making the circuit of the promontory on which the palace stood. On the cushions in the stern was visible a figure in a striped *khalat* and a broad turban of gleaming blue silk.

Rusudan thought she had seen such garments on a horse trader who used to come to the castle at Tphilis, but when the singer looked up she knew this was not the man. He had round cheeks and no beard at all. The little thrill of hope that had risen in her at the familiar refrain and the Moslem garments died.

The barge went on its way with even strokes of the oars, keeping its distance from the rock because it was forbidden any craft to approach near the promontory.

Upon this great mass of rock the palace of the Chersonese had been built, its walls of yellow marble rising sheer from the slope of the stone. Here and there towers peered above the many roofs of the miniature city. Rusudan had heard from the Greek slave-girls, who seemed to know everything, that the rock under them had been honeycombed by the waters of other ages, and passages descended into its depths—passages that led to storehouses and other chambers where the torturers of the emperor kept their instruments.

She had been told that long ago the ship of Jason and his Argonauts had sailed under this promontory, seeking Colchis. Others said that Mithridates, the lord of the Boshphorus, had been wont to sit in a throne carved in the summit of the rock, to review his fleets of galleys. She noticed that some of the columns of the porticoes were Roman work, and that the yellow marble was certainly very old.

Many times she had thought of trying to escape; but any one who leaped from the balconies would be dashed against the

jagged slope of rock. Besides, at night the guard boats of the Genoese and Lombards patroled the promontory.

As for trying to make her way to the shore, that was impossible. Eunuchs guarded the quarters of the women, and Greek spearmen every corridor and wall that led to the one gate of the palace. From this gate a narrow path ran along the ridge to the shore, in places not wide enough for a man to pass a horse.

At the far end of this neck of land was a massive wall flanked by towers rising from the steep cliff of the shore. This wall was a citadel in itself, always held by several companies of archers and men-at-arms under a trusted officer. No one could come out to the palace or leave it without being scrutinized.

Rusudan knew every detail of the shore, with its wide half-moon harbor filled with galleons from Genoa and clumsy craft of Constantinople, with swift little caiques plying among them, and the pleasure galleys and barges of the Greeks drifting from cove to cove.

Beyond the masses of painted wooden houses that lined the waterfront were rolling hills—white villas seen through the cool green of plane-trees and poplars, and here and there the glint of running water—gentle hills, beautiful in the half light of evening. But they were utterly unlike the giant Khaukesh, and they did not comfort the lonely Rusudan.

Now that the sun had set, the glow left the marble walls. Rusudan shivered, listening to the drone of the swell below her. The palace, with its spearmen in silvered mail, its barefoot slaves and throngs of whispering men, seemed to the girl to be a gigantic prison, and he who lay on the couch under the purple canopy in the dusk appeared to the girl to be not its master but one of its multitude of slaves.

Rusudan really felt sorry for Lascaris. She could hear him now, talking low-voiced to some one—a slender Lombard in hose and damask doublet, who knelt on the carpet, shielding his eyes with his arm as if from a dazzling light.

Because Lascaris must have forgotten her presence on the balcony, she kept very still and listened. The emperor was asking for news of the city, and the Lombard surely was an informer.

"No furs have come in from the northern trading posts, our agents say, may it please your august Majesty. There has been fighting on the Dnieper."

"So near? The tribesmen?"

"May your clemency be enlightened! The savage Russians of the northern forests were slaughtered and scattered by the pagans from Cathay—the Horde, as it is called."

"Ah." Lascaris was silent a moment. "I remember Choaspes described them to me."

"Some say they are the spawn of Gog and Magog, the soldiers of Antichrist come out of the deserts."

"They will not leave the steppes. But send Kallinos to me."

To Kallinos, commander of the mounted archers, the girl heard Lascaris give orders to station outposts in the hills and to arrange a beacon where the highroad from the north came within sight of the Chersonese five miles distant—this in case the pagans should send raiding parties down toward the sea.

Then Rusudan heard him berating the Genoese merchants who demanded more and more privileges. She slipped away into another corridor, past the guards of the women's quarters to her chamber that was next the apartment of the Domastikos, the chamberlain who was charged to watch over her.

An oil-lamp burned near her pallet—she must always have a light in the room—and a wrinkled Scythian woman, with the marks of slave-bracelets still on her arms, glided from the shadows.

"Come, Kyria, I have prepared rose-sweetened sherbet and stuffed olives and rice with—"

"But I am not hungry."

"Kyria, if you do not eat sweets you will not become plump and beautiful."

Rusudan took up the bronze mirror on the ebony stand by her bed and looked at

herself for a moment. Then she went to the window, throwing herself down on the floor and resting her head on her arms.

She could still see the port with its anchored ships, and for a while she watched a curtained galley that moved slowly seaward. Lanterns were hung about the deck of the pleasure craft, and she heard the lilt of a woman's voice and the clear melody of a harp.

"That is the boat of Choaspes the mighty lord," observed the woman behind her. "He sends daily to ask of your health."

"He has a sheep's heart and a lying tongue," declared Rusudan suddenly.

"*Ai*, he is not a hard master."

Rusudan watched the boat move away toward the villa of the *strategos* and heard the chant of men's voices, rhythmical and sure—of men indolent and happy and full-fed—and the chant was an invocation to the gods that had once been worshiped when Greece ruled this shore, seeking forgetfulness in its paradise.

But Rusudan, remembering many things, buried her dark head in her arms. The Scythian, watching her covertly, began to eat the dainties prepared for her mistress.

ARSLAN flung a handful of silver at the blacks who had rowed his barge, watched them scramble for the coins, and swaggered away down the stone jetty, one hand on his simitar hilt.

He sniffed the reek of fish frying in oil in a cook-shop, but hastened on without pausing until he dived into the dark alleys of the Genoese quarter, and came to a mud house without windows but with a spacious courtyard where a group of hawk-faced and turbaned warriors lay in the sand around a fire.

They greeted him with growls, and he grinned as he answered them.

"What! Ye have eaten—there is wine! Sleep and grow fat!"

Still, they were not content and said so.

"Then take service with the Greeks." Arslan chuckled. "Nay, it is not ten days that we came hither over the sea, the Swooping Hawk showing the way. Before then ye made moan because the boat went up and down and sidewise, as is the manner of boats. And before that ye were weary of waiting. But *he* is not weary."

"Is there word yet?" asked one.

"In this place is the talk of many lands. *Kai*, I have learned the price of Cyprian wine and of men with black skins."

The warrior cursed, and another rose up to stretch and spit. Arslan had chosen his followers from among the Uighurs and the Almalyk Turks, and the result was a fair resemblance to Muhammadans in dress and bearing, but he dared not trust them in the streets and he found them less patient than steppe wolves.

He had come to the Chersonese by night and had rented the house near the waterfront without much trouble, having gold as well as silver. A Bokharian bringing slaves from the Khaukesh might readily desire secrecy.

"We be weary of sitting on carpets," another warrior complained. "Let us go to the horse market."

"And be sitting on stakes for the Greeks to stare at. Only the nobles ride in this place."

It irked Arslan that he had to make his way around on foot, and that he could not pick a quarrel.

"Detachments of cavalry have gone forth," he observed thoughtfully, "and there is talk of guarding the roads. The time appointed is not distant."

When they would have questioned him more, he went into the house, stepping over three Circassian women asleep on the carpet. They were young and not ill-looking, but as yet Arslan had made no effort to sell his stock-in-trade.

Behind the curtain of the inner room he confronted Hugh.

"It is true," he said, "she is in the castle, out in the water. Yesterday I talked with the fruit sellers at the gate and learned nothing. Today I rowed around the *kurgan* and saw her face among other women."

"Beyond doubt?"

"She sang of the falcon, as in the Khaukesh."

"Did she know your face?"

"How can I tell? It was high, the balcony. *Wai-a!* Twenty javelin lengths and impossible to climb." Arslan appeared to meditate on other balconies and other women. "A guard shouted at us to go away. At night there are boats with lanterns."

"You have done well." The eyes of the crusader brightened. "Tomorrow you must go to the outwork of the palace and say that you wish to tell the young nobles about some new Circassian slaves. Give silver, but do not let the Greeks see gold. Ask no questions, but if you can get within the palace itself, look at everything and count the guards. Fail not to salaam to all the servants and kiss the ground before the *amirs*—the nobles."

Arslan grunted, but the prospect seemed to please him.

"And have a skiff brought to the garden of this *yurta*," added Hugh. "A small skiff with two oars."

"Why?"

"It would not be safe for you to be seen around the rock again. I have watched from the roof. Few go near it. But I will take the skiff and go alone at the same hour."

"Nay, too many in the *kurgan* know your face."

Arslan scrutinized his companion shrewdly. Hugh's red-gold beard had been shaved and his long hair clipped. His gambeson and mail had been discarded for a wadded robe and a sheepskin shoulder cloak with a hood that could be drawn up over his head, but the poise of the long body, the stride of a man accustomed to spurs and authority, were not to be concealed, or the scar of the sword-cut that ran from eye to chin.

"Nay," he said again, "in a boat there is no hiding. Have we come to the Chersonese to free a single woman or to prepare the way for Subotai? It is our task to open a road, and that was the *yassa*."

"It is my task to open the gate—yours to obey."

"That may be—" the broad face of the short Mongol grew stubborn—"but if you are slain how am I to finish what is barely begun?"

For answer Hugh drew the falcon tablet from the breast of his robe and Arslan nodded.

"The *paizah* of authority—aye, so. But it is no part of our duty to go out in a small boat under the eyes of a hundred Greeks for a word with a captive Georgian."

"Harken and remember this," Hugh said quietly. "If Subotai can seize the Chersonese he will have silks and ivory, red leather and precious stones, horses and gold and other things past counting. But I will find Rusudan and she will be mine."

Arslan yawned and stretched his arms, and looked around for his blankets.

"It is all one to me. But it is useless to try to trick the Greeks. Even an Armenian could not to that."

CHAPTER XIV

DUSK

ARSLAN came back from the promontory gate the next day very well pleased with himself, and wearing the alert, inquisitive look of a hound that has scented game—though he himself reeked to the evening skies. He had visited a barber in the bath-house by the *registan*, and his brows had been touched with antimony powder, his cheeks with rice dust, his head drenched with attar of roses; he was chewing mastic.

At the palace he had beheld undreamed-of magnificence and a multitude of human beings that bewildered him. He was thinking of the tales he would tell his men, as he crossed the *registan* again—the open square of the rambling city, called the plaza by the Genoese who liked to linger and gossip under its poplars.

It was very quiet in the plaza, though groups of seamen and soldiers were thronging around the doors of near-by taverns. Arslan saw a Greek horseman

gallop across the garden plots plying his whip.

As he passed through the alleys leading to the waterfront he noticed that the shop doors were closed and few people were visible, but in the shadow of the warehouses where the smell of sour wine and leather hung in the air he observed men in armor and heard the *click-click-click* of crossbows being wound.

"Eh," he thought, "such is the custom of this place—all the watchmen assemble in one band and go around with lights and noise so that even the dogs run from them."

It amused him a little, this need of locks and armed men, for in the Horde the tent dwellings were always open, and thieves unknown.

But here in the city of the emperor were Goths and Bulgarians of the army who preyed upon the Greeks, and Genoese who exacted usury from all.

When he entered the courtyard of his house Arslan looked up in surprize. His men were sitting around a pot of mutton-stew, dipping in with their fingers, obviously in high good humor. Some were whetting the edges of swords, others sorting arrows and tightening the grips of shields.

"What is this?" he asked.

They wiped their hands on their breeches and crowded around him.

"How are we to know?" one said. "We heard talk of horse herds entering the hills, and surely Subotai Bahadur comes."

"Ye heard talk!" Arslan echoed grimly. "Not here."

"In the taverns, O my Khan—where these people go to drink wine, instead of sitting with guests in their *yurtas*. We were weary of this pen, and we did not go far. Is there word from Subotai the *Orluk*?"

"Nay, the time is not yet."

His followers fingered their weapons and muttered. "Then perhaps there is a war among these people."

"Why?"

"A *noyon* mounted on a white horse of good breed reined into the yard of the wine *khana* and summoned warriors to him. He gave them money, and they beckoned up others who went with them from the tavern."

"Dogs!" cried the Mongol. "Could ye not eat and sleep without scratching up an ant-hill? Animals grunting and grazing under the eyes of a tiger!"

Very angry was Arslan, because it seemed to him that his men had brought suspicion on the house.

"The Swooping Hawk will lash ye! *He* is not as formerly. He does not jest any more, and often he sits thus."

The Mongol rested his chin on both hands, frowning.

"*Kai*," nodded a warrior. "At such times he holds his sword across his knees."

"When he came to us," went on Arslan reflectively, "he was seeking a road back to his tribe. He bore the great sword that had prevailed against his enemies. Now he has found the road and he is at the very door of his country, but he can not show his face because the lord of these people has put a price on his head."

"And there is a woman."

"Truly, a young woman with soft lips and dark eyes. But now she is a favorite of the Roumi *Kha Khan*."

Arslan shook his head sagely.

"He has been out on the water a long time," observed another. "With the two sticks of wood he pushed the little *yurta* out toward the palace until we could only see a speck under the rock."

"And then?"

"And then we—we were weary—"

Arslan muttered angrily and went to the flat roof of the house to look for the skiff. The sun had set, and the galleys at the quays and the long promontory itself were shadowy outline upon the gleam of water. Arslan looked back at the hills before leaving the roof, and uttered an exclamation. He hastened down to the courtyard, his *khalat* flapping around his short legs.

"The Sign!" he cried. "Look!"

They gathered around him and peered at the line of hills behind the city. A few

stars were visible, but within the break of the hills where the highroad lay, three red eyes winked at them, faint and flickering in the near-darkness.

"The signal of Subotai Bahadur," they assented.

Arslan had instructed them to watch by turns during the nights for the lighting of three fires on the ridge five miles away. This would mean that a detachment of Mongols had come down from the steppes, moving by night until this last day, when the horsemen would press forward, changing from pony to pony, outpacing the news of their coming.

"Ye know the plan," exclaimed the stout little Mongol. "Subotai Bahadur will gallop down the highroad as a bat flits through darkness. When he sees the first hamlets of the city he will order the drums to sound. Before then we must be at the gate in the wall that defends the neck of land and the castle at the far end."

"*Ai-al*"

"That was the plan. The Swooping Hawk will lead us. We will go by the alleys and gardens—I have marked the way—to the gate and lie hidden until the drums sound. Then we will run forward, and the Swooping Hawk will call out to open the gate—that there is danger. Perhaps they will not open the great doors, but they will let us in through the little door to hear the message. Then must we draw our weapons and drive away the guards—in the mid-watches no more than a score are awake—and open the great doors, holding our ground until the first riders of the Horde come up. After that we will see. I think we can reach the palace itself before the dogs of Roumis are astir."

It was a hazardous plan, depending on the prompt arrival of the Mongols after the signal, and the tricking of the guards. How long twelve men could hold the open gate against the swarming Greeks, Arslan did not know. But he had confidence in Sir Hugh, and he knew that the moments between the roll of the drums and the arrival of Subotai's riders would be few indeed.

Other cities had the Mongols taken in just such fashion, in the darkness.

"If he sees the signal he will return. But if he is taken by the emperor's men—" Arslan groaned and clutched his belt, trying to reason out what he should do.

The Mongols, after lighting the fires, would rest an hour, to make sure the signal was seen. In less than another hour they would be in the Chersonese. Arslan wondered how long the fires had been going before he saw them.

"Listen," one of his men whispered.

Outside the courtyard there was a sound of hurrying feet, and low-pitched voices—a movement of armed men, he knew, by the weight of the tread and the clinking of steel. When the sounds dwindled down the alley he drew a long breath of relief.

But there were other sounds that puzzled him—the galloping of horses hither and yon, a buzz of talk as a door was flung open; somewhere a trumpet blared.

The hair quivered up the back of his neck when he went to the roof again. Unless his eyes deceived him some of the galleys that had been anchored farther out were in motion toward the shore. And from the palace a long line of torches were coming along the ridge, toward the very gate that was to be their object of attack.

Meanwhile the bustle outside the courtyard grew louder. With the darkness, the Chersonese seemed to be astir. Arslan uttered a prayer to long-forgotten gods and thought of the furnaces and irons of the Greek torturer. Then he heard his name called. Sir Hugh was in the courtyard.

The crusader had entered from the alley and was swiftly putting on his mail hauberk, thigh-pieces and mittens. He drew the coif of ringed steel over his head and belted on his sword, while the Mongols clustered around him silently.

"The Genoese are mustering in their quarter of the town," he said. "Men under arms hold the plaza."

"Why?"

Hugh shook his head. He had rowed close to the promontory, until cross-bow

bolts whizzing past his head had driven him away. The sun was setting then, and he noticed the stir in the city. Heading in to one of the quays, he walked through the plaza and noticed bands of men under arms. But he had met with silence rather than outcry.

"We have seen the three fires in the hills," cried Arslan.

The crusader jerked tight the buckle of his belt, turned to look at the signal that flickered through the darkness. Running to the garden wall, he stared out at the bay—at the torches that were thronging from the castle. The Mongols followed him expectantly, as dogs press close to the heels of their master.

Listening to the tread of feet in the alley, he gripped the hilt of Durandal and tried the blade in its sheath.

"By the splendor of God," he said laughing, "there will be many to keep us company at the gate."

He went to the door, flinging it open, and strode into the darkness. The eleven warriors followed him.

Not many minutes passed before the three Circassians, who had been listening with all their ears, crept out to see whether in truth their guards had vanished. Huddled together, the women slipped into the alley and hastened by common consent toward the distant lights.

CHAPTER XV

THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE

THE restless stirring of the city had not penetrated to the palace. Late that afternoon the courtiers still sat under the awnings about the fountain that tossed its scented spray into the hot air of the central inclosure. Some of them diced or gossiped without energy. The yellow marble walls still gave out the heat of the sun's rays, and it was pleasant to sit in the shade and do nothing.

Imperial guardsmen in silver scale-mail and gilt leggings chatted at the foot of the long stairs that led from the court of the fountain to the emperor's chambers, which were on the side farthest from the land.

They greeted familiarly the slender figure of the Arab *hakim*, Abu Bekr, in his immaculate white cotton robe and hood, as he made his way into the presence.

"Thanks to thine arts, the Most Magnificent gains in health."

The Arab brushed his fingers against his forehead, and answered enigmatically.

"What Allah hath done is well done."

He passed through the outer corridors, and salaamed low at the threshold of the chamber that opened upon the balcony over the sea. A glance at his patient showed him that Lascaris seemed comfortable.

At that moment the emperor was talking with several nobles who had made the journey from Nicea to greet him. But he soon tired of that, and Abu Bekr asked them to leave the sick man. Then the physician felt Lascaris' pulse, and squatted down on the carpet by the couch, thrusting his hands into his sleeves, dignified and silent.

"Recovery is sure?" questioned the emperor, who spoke Arabic well.

"What is written may not be changed, O King of the age. But all the signs are favorable."

"Now am I at ease," Lascaris fingered his thin lips. "Thou, *hakim*, and the girl Rusudan cause me no anxiety. The others all come to beg for something."

He gazed at the Georgian captive with pleasure, because he took delight in beauty and knew it when he saw it. Often he had thanked the gods that Choaspes had seen fit to make her a hostage. He did not quite know what Choaspes planned to do with the Georgian, but it was advisable not to have a young woman in the throne of one of the most warlike of the frontier peoples and, besides, he might arrange a marriage for her—with a Greek.

And he wondered what Rusudan could find to think about, as she sat by the window of the balcony, watching the water with eager eyes.

"The wine, Rusudan," he said.

After a moment's hesitation, she rose and went past the giant Ethiopian who stood, motionless as the onyx pillar of the doorway, with his hands folded on the hilt of a bared simitar. Whenever any one entered or left the chamber the negro moved his head a little and looked at Lascaris. But he had grown accustomed to the Georgian and he did not move as she brushed by him, merely breathing deep, as a dog does when half asleep.

She filled the emperor's goblet from a jar brought by a little deaf-mute girl, and at the same time the *domastikos*, who was the chamberlain of the palace, offered her the tray with Lascaris' supper. The sick man had asked for seasoned food, and the tray held a dish of rice curry.

Rusudan smiled, because the *domastikos*, in his high cap of cloth-of-silver and his curls glistening with oil always amused her. Since she had the favor of the sick emperor, the officials of the palace always bowed profoundly to her and addressed her as Kyria.

"It is a wonder," murmured the Greek, "that any woman should have such color without henna stain, and such clear eyes as the most fortunate Kyria."

Rusudan looked at him without answering and the Greek seemed uncomfortable, perhaps because she gave the silver tray to the little girl to hold. While she knelt by the couch beside the deaf-mute slave Rusudan's thoughts went out to the water. She did not taste the wine as she usually did before Lascaris drank of it. And as soon as he had emptied the goblet she hastened to the window.

For an hour that afternoon she had watched Hugh in his skiff, not daring to go to the balcony while the eyes of the Greeks were on her. His face had changed, and in his sheepskins he must have looked to the guards like a fisherman.

But Rusudan knew him by the turn of his head, the thrust of his powerful arms and his way of lifting his chin. Not many rowers dared come near the palace, and no fisherman would have sat calmly when a cross-bow bolt whipped past. Rusudan hardly breathed, until he had drifted out from the rocks.

Even then she fastened her eyes on the skiff, noting greedily every swing of the man's shoulders, every slight motion that might mean he had seen her, though he could not have done so within the chamber, at such a height.

Since she had been brought to the court she had heard the story of the crusader who defied the emperor, and whenever she saw the Genoese, Trevisani, she thought with dismay how she had urged Sir Hugh to seek safety among the Greeks. She understood now that this man would not turn aside from peril, and she told herself that he had come to the Chersonese to seek her.

At times her veins were chilled by the fear that he might be recognized and given to the hands of the silent and beast-like torturers who awaited the summons of Lascaris in the passages below the palace. She had seen captives and women who screamed at the sight of these men.

But now she quivered with exultation and her heart sent the blood beating through her body; she could rejoice in his daring, and it seemed to her as if all the men in the chamber must guess her secret —that she had seen the man she loved and that somehow he would come near her and she would hear his voice.

Now the skiff was no longer visible, and all the shore was veiled in ruddy twilight. Rusudan rested her head on her arms, her lips half smiling. And then she caught her breath, hearing close behind her a groan that seemed to have come from an animal rather than a human being.

She looked around. The deaf mute still knelt by the couch holding the tray on her arms, but the eyes of the negro were rolling wildly, and on the couch Lascaris lay, tearing at his body with quivering fingers.

"Poison!" he grunted. "It is burning me!"

He flung himself over on his side, coughing and retching and crying for Abu Bekr.

RUSUDAN stood by the couch, voiceless. The Arab leaned over the emperor, one knee on the couch, and touched his throat. He seized the chin of the struggling man and looked swiftly into the contorted face. Then he stepped back, glancing at the empty golden dish that had held the rice curry, and at the Georgian girl.

"No man may escape his fate," he said calmly. "For *him* it is the hour appointed, and for thee and me—the All-Wise knoweth."

"You must save him!" the girl cried. "Bring wine."

But Abu Bekr merely shook his head. He turned and went to the other end of the carpet and knelt, bending his head and stretching forth his hands, palm down.

"*Haram dar pishat,*" he said under his breath. "The sanctuary is before thee, and lo, there comes a day of days when the believers shall count their joys."

He was facing toward the south, preparing to meet the end of life and oblivious of other matters. Into the chamber thronged the *domastikos*, the captain of the guards, and frightened slaves.

Lascaris' lips were drawn back from his teeth and foam dripped from his mouth.

"Kallinos! Daim! Choaspes! They have poisoned me."

The officers and slaves were staring at him, mouths agape. The glow of sunset had faded from the room, and the purple canopy turned from crimson to a dim black.

"*Ai!*" cried the *domastikos*, wringing his hands. "Your sacred Clemency—your Supreme Magnificence—"

He tried to make the emperor lie down, with fumbling, ineffective movements. In the corridors women were wailing, and more people pressed into the room.

"In this day the righteous and unrighteous shall number their deeds—" the murmur of the Moslem reached Rusudan's ears.

Then Lascaris thrust the *domastikos* aside and pulled himself to the edge of the couch, the sweat running from his head, his body jerking with cramps.

"The torturers!" he gasped. "Make the girl speak. She brought wine—she knows!"

And he pointed at Rusudan.

"The barbarian hath slain the emperor," cried the *domastikos* loudly. And the women, who had long been jealous of the favor shown Rusudan, echoed his words in shrill voices.

After that there was more tumult outside the room, but those around the couch kept silent, listening to the heavy breathing of the man who wore the imperial purple. A change had come over Lascaris; his eyes were sunken and heavy. He lay prone, though his hands kept pushing at the silk covering as if he would raise himself up. Rusudan found herself speaking, very slowly:

"I am guiltless. The wine was given me by this child, who is innocent. I drank of it."

"How much?" the *domastikos* mocked her.

"The Arab saw. The poison was in the food, not the wine."

No one answered her, and she saw that many of the guards were gazing at her curiously. Rusudan thought that Abu Bekr had known nothing of the plot and that others, unseen, had put the poison in the strongly seasoned curry. Lascaris had been very weak—

Hands grasped her shoulders, slid down to her wrists, and she felt a leather cord touch her skin. With all her strength she struggled to free her arms and then to tear herself loose and run to the balcony, to escape the torture by leaping into the sea.

The hands tightened, pressing into her flesh, and the cord was drawn fast. An arm reached around her, slipping the cord about her knees, which were bound and lashed to her wrists. Then she ceased struggling and lifted her head.

"Confess—tell who gave you the poison," demanded the captain of the guards.

"She will not speak—now," retorted the *domastikos*. "She is stubborn."

"No woman can endure the pain," muttered the Greek officer in the silvered

mail, biting his lips. "Better that she named the assassins—"

"I know nothing," cried Rusudan, "for I was seized by traitors, and brought among you. Ask of the men who have watched their lord dying and have taken thought only for the torment of a captive."

"Begin," said the *domastikos* dryly.

An iron band was slipped over Rusudan's head, and she felt it clasped close upon her hair. She made no effort to see the men who held her; instead she turned her head toward the Greeks and though there were shadows under her eyes and her lips trembled a little, she spoke to them clearly.

"I will be avenged, and the sword that strikes you down will know no mercy!"

Impatiently the *domastikos* made a sign. Rusudan felt no pain, and she stood very still. The hands moved around her head, and the iron creaked. Then two tiny points of steel pressed into her temples behind the eyes. The girl's body stiffened and she cried out.

"Again!" a voice demanded.

The points of steel turned slowly, boring through the skin, and blood dripped into her lips. Agony surged into every nerve, and she strained forward. The arms of the torturers caught her and held her upright. They pulled away the strands of damp hair that had caught in the screws when she struggled.

"Again!" commanded the *domastikos.*

But Rusudan did not hear his voice. She lay unconscious in the arms of the torturers, and the *domastikos* turned his attention to the figure on the couch. Then for the first time one of the men who held Rusudan spoke.

"He is dead."

There was a stir around the couch. Some one laid a hand on the face of Theodore Lascaris, and the unseen women wailed anew. But a tumult arose in the great courtyard, and scarcely a moment had passed before a name was shouted by many throats.

"Choaspes! Choaspes reigns! Long life to the emperor!"

The officers in the death chamber exchanged glances, anxious, suspicious or exulting. No one touched a sword, and the *domastikos,* who had watched their faces to good effect, held up his arms.

"The army has chosen the successor to Lascaris. Who is better than the scion of the Comneni?"

When no one answered, he turned briskly to the guards nearest him.

"Look to that woman. Take the irons from her, or she won't gain her senses. Then begin with the torture again, until she confesses."

The Greeks were pushing from the room. The *domastikos* thrust his way among them, his cap askew on one ear, his face flushed. No one paid any attention to the body on the couch except the giant black who still kept his post, breathing heavily.

Running down the marble stairs, the *domastikos* forced his way through the guards who were grouped around Choaspes. The *strategos* was mounted, and the cloak over his shoulders was purple edged with gold that gleamed in the torchlight. Bending down, he listened to the whisper of the *domastikos*—

"May your Magnificence live for ten thousand years—"

Choaspes spoke impatiently, and the chamberlain nodded.

"It is finished—all. The Arab was cast from the rock."

"And you have—a captive?"

"The gods were kind! Lascaris himself cried out to torture her."

"Who?"

"Rusudan."

Choaspes started, then was silent a moment.

"The little Gipsy! By the throne of Bacchus! Well, she was a barbarian." His eyes quested through the court, searching faces. "The Bulgars and Goths in the other wing of the palace have held out against us. They are surrounded and will be cut down. Trevisani holds the plaza and his galleys the waterfront. The mob is wild and knows not what to shout.

Toss silver freely among them and they also will cry 'Choaspes!' "

He gathered up his reins that were heavy with silver-work and tassels. The charger he bestrode, a white Dalmatian, edged sidewise and snorted, sensing the excitement of the throng of men. Already that evening Choaspes had ridden him through most of the Chersonese, giving orders to his sympathizers and broaching wine kegs for the mob.

But Choaspes listened to the clatter of steel and the hoarse outcry in the barracks by the gate courtyard. The barbarians who served Lascaris had seen their leaders bound and led away, and had taken to their weapons. In a few moments the fighting lessened, and a Greek lieutenant came to report that the way was clear for the emperor to ride into the city.

Then Choaspes gave command for the trumpets to sound. He was exceedingly anxious to win over the thousands in the port before some of his cousins might form a faction against him.

Of Rusudan he did not think again save that it would be diverting to watch the torture of the young girl. It was necessary, now, she should be made to confess that she had given the poison, and Choaspes never questioned necessity.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SALUTE TO THE KHAN

SIR HUGH thrust his way through a growing crowd until he came within sight of the wall that barred the approach to the palace, and no one tried to oppose him, because all the Chersonese was hastening toward the plaza and the waterfront and this same gate at the land end of the promontory. Besides, after a glance at the crusader, men were at pains to make way for him.

So he reached the first tower and pressed forward until he could see within the gate itself. The massive doors were pulled back and wedged in place by a mass of shouting humanity. A double line of Greek guards with plumed helmets and gilded shields were trying to keep the mob out of the roadway. And up the road companies of armed men were passing into the city streets—Nubians with long bronze shields, grinning in the torchlight; dark-faced Kumanians on restless horses; and men-at-arms in the livery of the Comneni.

Arslan and his ten warriors had managed to keep behind the crusader by dint of curses and drawn swords, and now they gazed at this parade of a emperor's soldiery, bewildered and uneasy.

It was no easy matter to find out what was happening.

"The beacon was seen in the hills," a perspiring seaman explained to Sir Hugh, and others contradicted him at once.

"Nay, a village is burning."

"There were three lights—by the eyes of the gods, a portent!"

"Thou hast licked the cup o'ermuch, Paulo. The emperor is dead, I say."

But even the most drunk of the throng realized the truth when Choaspes walked his horse under the lifted portcullis of the gate, and the guards shouted his name. There was muttering among the townspeople and an oath from the seaman. Dread impelled them to shout with the soldiers, but there was a real roar of enthusiasm when the nobles following Choaspes flung handfuls of silver and gold among them.

"Glory to the Christ-loving monarch! May he live for ten thousand years!"

"Hail, the Comnenus!"

"Choaspes, our kind lord."

At the same time the crowd began to surge and try to follow the nobles. Sir Hugh grasped Arslan's shoulder.

"The gate is open," he said quickly, "but ten thousand men are awake and armed. If Subotai has come he will have no more than a thousand. Go and find horses. Go swiftly to the highroad beyond the town and warn him. Take this for a token."

He ripped the falcon tablet from his throat and thrust it into the Mongol's hand.

"I am going to the palace."

Arslan and his ten melted into the hurrying throng and the crusader strode to the postern gate and caught the attention of the sentry by whirling him around with steel-meshed fingers that bruised his flesh.

"Is Lascaris dead?"

"Aye, by poison." The man twisted, and grew subservient when he could not free himself. "May it please your Mightiness, the barbarian girl Rusudan gave the poison."

For an instant the gray eyes under the dull steel of the helmet were blank, and then the Greek beheld them blaze with sudden anger. He reached for his sword, and the crusader's other hand crushed his wrist.

"What have they done to her?"

"She has been given to the torture."

Sir Hugh flung the Greek against the granite wall, and before any others could stay him he kicked open the postern and stepped through it, swinging it shut behind him.

The guards on the other side paid little attention to an armed man running toward the narrow road that led to the palace. Choaspes' following had passed under the gate, and the motley throng that pressed on the heels of the soldiers made way promptly for the crusader, who had drawn his long sword and had cast away the sheath.

Out on the narrow ridge there were groups of servitors who hurried toward the shore anticipating loot, and such of them as bore torches turned to look after Sir Hugh. Unexpected things were happening in the Chersonese that night, and it was not wise to ask questions. Occasional torches guided him along the road where a false step meant a plunge down the bank into the water. He ran swiftly, drawing deep breaths and thrusting forward the weight of the heavy weapon.

It was nearly a mile out to the first gate of the promontory. Presently he forced himself to walk slowly until he could breathe evenly and the pulse ceased to hammer at his throat. Before him was the lighted portal of the wall, and he knew he would have need of all his strength if he would reach Rusudan.

In the entrance courtyard no one looked at him because the guards and slaves were busy stripping gold armlets and bits of silver work from the bodies of the Goths and Bulgars who had resisted the new emperor and now lay outstretched on the tiles their braids of hair blood-soaked.

Sir Hugh paced through the corridors and turned into a long hall lined with statues on black marble pedestals. Here he halted, uncertain, until he sighted the fountain in the glow of oil-lamps that burned in bronze tripods at either side the wide stair that led to the far wing of the palace. He went toward the fountain and found himself in the open central court facing two spearmen who were filling goblets from an opened keg, their bowed iron shields laid aside.

"What man art thou?" one of them hailed him.

He turned in his stride, and they caught up their spears, drawing back before the fury that twisted his lips and scarred his brow.

"O fools," he laughed, "to ask!"

He slashed down with the sword, splintering the spear shafts and, stepping forward, slew one with a cut over the breastplate.

The other fled, and the crusader picked up one of the heavy shields, thrusting his arms into the leather loops.

Eunuchs in green and blue robes and black slaves had gathered at the head of the stair when they heard the clash of weapons. When Sir Hugh leaped up the marble steps two javelins flew down at him, and these he caught on the shield. The creatures out of Asia shrilled at him, standing their ground until he cut right and left, the massive blade of Durandal—that never had been wielded in such work before—maiming and knocking them down.

The survivors screamed and fled as if from death itself, but the long-limbed warrior in mail ran one down, seizing him by the throat.

"Where is the captive, Rusudan?" he asked, and repeated the question in Arabic.

The slave pointed, voiceless, down a corridor to an open door. Sir Hugh's fingers tightened on his throat and then released him, and the slave fell to the floor.

Over the threshold of Lascaris' chamber the crusader stepped silently. One glance showed him Rusudan lying on the silk carpet, the dark tangle of her hair spreading over her throat and breast. Beside her rested a brazier and before this a pallid man in stained leather was sorting over little iron rods, thrusting them into the glowing coals to heat.

Sprawled on the floor, or standing behind the torturer, eight Greeks watched with avid eyes, until one glanced toward the door and, beholding the man in mail with the five-foot blade bared in his hand, sprang up with a warning cry.

" 'Ware ye!"

The crusader sprang in on them, and the mighty blade of Durandal flashed in a wide circle. The first Greek was dashed against the couch, his light, silvered mail rent and his body hewn from throat to thigh. The torturer, looking up, was struck between the eyes, and rolled and slid along the carpet as Sir Hugh wrenched his weapon from the crushed skull.

This instant's delay gave the seven a chance to cover themselves with their shields and rush in. But the crusader leaped aside and slashed, and leaped away again, as an Arab fights, striking and warding at once.

No time for the point—the edge of Durandal bit through the gilded leather shields of the guards, through the light steel rings, and smote them to the floor. Their weapons clashed on him as he whirled, glancing from the ever-moving shield or the lowered helm of tempered steel.

Three of them lay lifeless, though Sir Hugh bled from shoulders and thighs. The other four gripped him close, one man clutching his knees and another his sword arm.

He dashed his shield into the face of a Greek who advanced on him with lifted ax. He raised his right arm, drawing up the guard who clung to it until the man's feet cleared the floor. Lifting high the point of Durandal, he brought the massive ball of the pommel down on the helmet of the Greek who held his knees.

A blade struck his throat, rasping against the tight-drawn coif and he staggered against the wall. The edge of his shield he thrust under the chin and the snarling lips of the warrior who had fastened on his sword arm, and the man gave back.

"Satan is in him!" gasped one of the surviving three.

Until now there had been not a moment's respite, but when the Greeks saw the bodies of their comrades motionless on the great carpet they howled and ran to the doors and clattered down the corridors.

Hugh knelt at the side of Rusudan and placed his hand on her breast. He stroked with clumsy, quivering fingers the dark spots on her temples and drew back the disordered tresses from her throat, seeking for wounds. His lips moved soundlessly as he clasped her hand and found it warm and supple.

Springing up, he lifted a clenched fist and shook it at the tiled dome that gleamed above him.

"She lives! Dear Siegneur God, she lives yet!"

And, beside himself with joy, he sent his deep-throated battle shout down the echoing halls.

THE lifeless eyes of Theodore Lascaris—he who had hunted the crusader out of Jerusalem into the barren land—were turned upon a scene of carnage and of untold happiness. Rusudan, reviving, stirred and looked up into the drawn face of the man she loved and felt his arm under her shoulders.

Her eyelids quivered and opened wide. She lifted a weak hand and touched his cheek and dry, hot lips.

"My Lord Hugh—"

And beholding the brazier so near, and the body of the torturer, she caught at his hand. Because pain still wracked her and the dread of the last hour had not loosed its grip upon her, she wept.

"Dear God—that I should bring you to death!"

But when men appeared in one of the doors, whispering and staring at them, and the crusader, arising, took his sword in hand, she laughed, seeing the Greeks draw back.

"*Gurgaslan*," she cried softly. "My lion, they fear thee."

No others came, and presently the crusader found the doors and embrasures empty of faces. He went to the balcony and heard nothing moving. Then for a while he considered, frowning.

"There is no good in waiting. Little Rusudan—" and he smiled at her—"there is hope in going forth. Be the end what it will—'twill come the sooner."

Rusudan bent her head and pressed her lips to his, and whispered against the mail coif.

"Let us go forth—so it be together."

They left the chamber of the emperor with its dead, and passed down the corridor, finding it empty of foes. The crusader listened and heard movement at the foot of the great stair. Turning once to make certain nothing was behind him, he gripped tighter the sword and strode to the head of the marble steps. And there he stopped, his whole body rigid.

The courtyard was full of Mongols.

TORCHES gleamed on the yellow marble of the walls and the horses of the nomads were stamping restlessly on the tiled floor. Some were drinking from the fountain. At the foot of the stair preparing to dismount was a group of *noyons*, Subotai at their head.

A hundred eyes recognized Sir Hugh and took instant note of the beauty of Rusudan. It was too late to draw back now, and he faced the issue squarely. Not a Greek was in sight and these riders were certainly masters of the palace. Before Subotai or any one else could ask the girl of him, he spoke.

"Subotai Bahadur! The gates were open, the way was clear. Give me men to serve me."

Subotai, resting on one stirrup, loomed in the torchlight like a giant satyr in black lacquer. Sir Hugh did not know how he had arrived in the courtyard; but the Eagle's eyes were blazing.

He had seen the bodies in the outer court, the dead Greek at the stair. The few others who had remained in the palace after Choaspes forsook it had been crowding around the emperor's chamber, and they had fled into cellars and hidden passages in the rock beneath. It seemed to Subotai as if this solitary man in armor who came forth sword in hand, bearing in his arms a beautiful captive, had made himself master of the place.

"*Hai!*" he growled. "You have spoken boldly. Now hear my answer."

He pointed with satisfaction to the rich tapestries of the corridors above them and the gold plates that gleamed in the walls.

"All this is mine! Men came to me in the darkness bearing the falcon tablet of the Swooping Hawk, saying my enemies were many, their standards lifted for battle."

The deep voice of the Mongol began to drawl as he related his deeds of the night.

"I listened to the warning. Yet I pressed nearer to see my enemies. I rode my horse into the alleys, and still the alarm was not given. I looked with the eyes of a ferret for a trap. There was no trap. The Roumis were drinking and making outcry along the shore, blinded by many lights."

There fell a pause, as Subotai's mind lingered on the aspect of that shore—the multitude of many races speaking many tongues, making outcry for no visible reason; the warriors mingled with the women and the slaves; and here and there dark figures looting while nobles in shining garments cast money to the throngs to earn their cheers. Never had Subotai beheld so fair an opportunity for a charge or such rich booty.

"Of what avail is a multitude, when there is no chieftain? We slew from afar with arrows the khan who sat on the white horse. He died like a hare, and we took his horse. His men formed here and there. Some fled to stone *yurtas*, others to wooden houses upon the water."

Sir Hugh could picture the affair—the close-packed bands of Mongols loosing arrows as they galloped, the astonished and terrified Greeks, the rush to safety within the villas and warehouses and ships.

"Men will say of this night," added the Eagle, "Subotai came with swift horses, escorted by naked blades. He scattered the sparks of war and trampled on chieftains; he sent the young to join the old, and he purged the earth of the weak.

"I have crossed the rivers of the western world; I have seen all things. I have taken much gold and many precious objects, but the pasture lands are poor, the horses weak. The men mistrust one the other and do not hold to their spoken word. It is time for me to go back to tell this to Genghis Khan in Cathay. Besides, the Roumis will swarm out tomorrow, and I mean to be clear of the town."

He considered Sir Hugh in silence for a moment.

"Why did you send back to me the falcon tablet? Why do you keep for yourself such a fair captive? We have poured water on our swords. Come, then, to Cathay. There will be power, then, in your words, and your children will be spared the death punishment for all generations."

"Nay, Subotai. It is time for me to go to my homeland."

The Mongol nodded; he could understand that.

"When you ride to the grazing land of your tribe, O Swooping Hawk, the old minstrels will sit by you, making songs of your deeds, and there will be feasting."

But Sir Hugh smiled, bethinking him of the lot of a returning crusader—begging his way through hostile lands, shouldered aside by the cavalcades of merchants, railed at by innkeepers who might have hastened forth to bow to his stirrup when he first rode from the cities of Europe with the Cross sewn to his shoulder. He thought of going back among strange faces, to find his property in the hands of others and himself forgotten—with only the tale of his own suffering to tell—if children and those who had not wearied of the word "Jerusalem" would listen.

"Nay," he said again. "I shall take the *yurta* of the sea and return to the Khaukesh."

At the sound of the familiar word Rusudan stirred and would have questioned him, but he was watching Subotai, grim of eye and tense of lip.

"I have found what I sought," he said.

"She is fairer than other women," cried Subotai. "She will bear clear-eyed children. Yield her to me."

Deep in his throat laughed Sir Hugh.

"Before I yield her I shall take life from her, Subotai. And your men—they who live—will tell of the end of the Swooping Hawk."

With pride, for it is not given to many men to bear a Rusudan in their arms, he advanced down the broad marble steps, his eyes menacing, his sword gripped firm, his shield covering the girl, her dark hair flooding over his shoulder.

Beholding him so, in rent and battered mail, as he moved down toward the waiting throng of riders, Suboati's green eyes glowed and he reined back his horse. His lips parted and he seemed to struggle inwardly with words. Greater than his disappointment was his delight in such daring. Again he backed his horse, speaking over his shoulder to his men, who pulled their ponies aside until a lane was left clear before the crusader.

When he strode among them, a hundred arms were tossed weaponless over wild heads and crests, and from a hundred throats a roar went up—

"*Ahai—ahatou—hail*"

It was the salute to the khan, only given to men who were honored above all others.

At the Bottom of the Sea

BY

KINGSLEY MOSES

IMAGINE yourself lost in a pitch-black, foggy night in the country. You can not see your hand before your face. There is no sound to be heard. Suddenly, as you stumble through the slime underfoot, grotesque pillars of rock begin to loom up round you, their outlines dimly illumined by an uncanny light. Great plants of coral, fan-shaped or gaunt as cactus begin to glow; slim fish, faintly phosphorescent, slide by and a long luminous snake writhes past and vanishes in the skeleton ribs of what upon scrutiny turns into the semblance of the rotted hulk of a long-lost Spanish galleon. Mad fantasy, yes? Well, it is probably a good deal like that on the bottom of the sea.

Hidden eternally from the eye of man, the great depths of the ocean must, probably forever, defy exploration. But beginning with the work of Lieutenant Maury of the U. S. Navy, and continuing by experiments with deep-sea cable-laying, the world has come to know something of the vast sunken continent which is nearly three times as large as all the visible area of the earth.

How far down into the water the most brilliant sunlight can penetrate has never been definitely established. A diver in the Caribbean, finding a soggy newspaper on the bottom, was able to read it quite easily at a depth of a hundred feet. Even at the depth limit of the best professional divers—about three hundred feet—there is light enough to see to work. But Dr. Hartman, who has invented a camera for underwater photography, reports that the most sensitive film is untouched by light at a two-thousand foot limit. Since even the average depth of the ocean is over two miles, it may readily be understood how utterly dark and still and dreary the floor of the sea must be.

In cable-laying it has, of course, been necessary to survey the lay of the submarine land with thorough-going accuracy. Just as the continent of America has its prairies, its valleys and its towering mountains, so the depths of the sea hold deep depressions over five miles below the surface and, again, there rear peaks of submarine mountains which in such waters as surround the Azores, for example, rise up from a two-mile depth to within a very few feet of sea level.

Since there is no light in the ocean depths there can be no warmth; nor, on the other hand, can there be any cold to approach the zero climate of our own winters. Three miles down the average temperature varies little more than five degrees: from thirty-two Fahrenheit to twenty-seven. There is, then, no ice—for the pressure keeps deep waters from freezing—no snow nor wind; but on the other hand there is eternal, immutable chill and gloom.

That any life may exist in such a gloomy habitat is amazing; but even so far back as 1861 the picking up of a broken length of cable revealed the existence of living creatures at a depth of a mile. And certain species of sharks and cod may go down nearly as far. Smaller fish, taken at greater depths, always come to the surface with air-bladders burst, on account of the sudden removal of the water's pressure. For what little time they can live out of their native deeps they can swim only lopsidedly or upside down, their equilibrium completely destroyed. Blind and jellylike, they can exist only in their icy caverns of gloom, and the life-giving light of the earth very quickly kills them.

Beginning a Novel of

A New

By
ROGER POCOCK

CHAPTER I

MEMORY

THIS afternoon we sat in the new-mown hay, "all smell and tickles" as Nurse Maryon said. We had tea with strawberries and cream. We looked out over steep grass and headlands of white cliffs to where the Channel shimmered blue and silver with fields of purple shadow from big clouds. We sat in heaven, listening to the tortures of the eternal guns as they throbbed and muttered far away in France.

The other patients buried our nurses in hay, and sat on them till they squawked. I'm not allowed in scrums because my roof has the tiles loose, but it was nice to sit watching the young subs at play, not to mention three pretty women. Nurse Maryon has bright bay hair, almost chestnut, and freckles, and her eyes are always changing with her moods from a twinkle of fun to a sudden blaze of rage. Aye, she's a bonny woman.

Of course I couldn't tell Nurse Maryon how I loved her in that past life of ours nine hundred years ago—at least the profane subalterns would have to be chased off first. But there's another reason. The hospital people are not sure I'm quite all there. I'm not so sure myself, and if I told my story they would shove me into a lunatic asylum. To speak is dangerous, to keep silence is torment, and so I'm writing the story just to get relief. Unless it gives me a temperature the medical officer says there's no harm in my scribbling fiction.

A good idea, that. The Army censor doesn't mind what an officer writes or publishes so long as he calls it fiction.

Yes, it's a sound idea. The fellow I'm supposed to be was at least a gentleman. He's dead, of course. But, if he still had the use of this body I'm living in, he would object to having his name and his private affairs in print.

I have come into this life on false pretences. What right have I to B——'s money or to the love so freely offered by his people or to the homage of his gallant Battery? So soon as I can, without appearing to be insane, I must render his money to the war funds, estrange his people, leave his Battery. Of his body I am the heir, and for his honor's sake I can not leave the service for which he died. Of all the dead, the innumerable host of England's dead now serving with her armies, invisible defenders of her freedom waging her battle against the powers of hell, it may well be that I alone shall be permitted to die again for her.

Yet during this convalescence I may be

the Norseman, Leif Ericson

Found World

given time before I join for service to write in the guise of fiction the story of an old and great adventure through which I lived nine hundred years ago.

There is the English Channel sparkling blue in the sunshine, purple under the clouds, where steel steam-driven ships go out to all the seas, come home from all the world. What on earth has happened to the Norse and Danish long-ships, the serpent-headed man-driven galleys of the Vikings? I can't get used to these new, unnatural steam craft. They're so ugly.

Nurse Maryon says I must leave my scribbles and have my tea.

I HAD my tea—so that's that.

And I would like to enter at once upon my story, but that Nurse Maryon wants me to explain things. For what's the use, she argues, of rising from the dead unless I've got something to say better worth hearing than a common tale of adventure here on earth. What have I got to say about other worlds? I know no more than she does.

It seems that from life to life we keep on growing until we are able to see beyond the scope of any mortal vision and hear beyond the range of human ears, to read unspoken thoughts of men and women, to descry the past, the distant future, to grasp the affairs of a growing civilization, and sense the presence of worlds beyond this earth. The Age of Miracles is just beginning.

"I, that was dead." By use of that false phrase I made Nurse Maryon understand me, whereas the truth would seem to her sheer madness. For she and I and all of us alike are spirits, and immortal.

I am a spirit in the heavenly host sent to this World time and again for training. In the tenth century my name was Leif, my surname "The Fortunate," my country Iceland. My God was Thor. For trade I used the sea. My body died, but my spirit lived on until in the sixteenth century I was sent here re-embodied for further training. My birth-name then was John, my country England, and I served the Christ. By trade I was soldier, but afterward used the sea. Again my body died, but my spirit survived to serve in the host of spirits attending the British Field Force in Flanders in its war with Satan. In the heat of the fighting it seems that I found the abandoned body of a Battery Commander, and took cover in it. The brain was shattered, its faculty of memory was destroyed. Perhaps it was by order of the Archangel Commanding-in-Chief that I was granted memory not of the body but of the spirit. Certain it is that I remember nothing of this body or its life until I woke up in a field hospital. I find myself the heir to fine traditions, the strong vitality of a clean life with many powerful impulses, formed habits, a soldierly

education, a career—and all of that seems to me like a dream from which I shall awaken presently.

Nurse Maryon calls that other life a dream. Perhaps it is. How should I know? Neither she nor any other sensible person can be asked to believe that I am Leif the Lucky, the first-born son of Eric Thorwaldson, surnamed The Red, and of his wife the Lady Hilda. To me this book shall be the memoirs of Leif Ericson. To you, good reader, it shall be a novel. So on both sides we shall be satisfied.

"Then," says Maryon, "why fuss?"

Because it seems to be right that we should have this out, and get to an understanding. Take my memoirs for a dream or a novel if you will, but if you read Icelandic History you shall find that Eric the Red was a very real man who lived at Ax Isle, at the entry of Hvammsfirth which is the southern arm of Broadfirth on the west coast of Iceland. You shall find that in the spring of A. D. 982 this Eric, being banished by the District Court at Thorsness, discovered Greenland, and founded there a colony which lasted four hundred years. You shall find moreover that his son Leif the Fortunate was first explorer and settler of North America, and founded in what is now the United States his trading post of Vineland the Good. Of that trade the very latest trace is record of a ship-load of Vineland timber reaching Norway in the year 1442. That year Columbus was a three-year-old barefoot brat in a slum outside the walls of Genoa. Twenty years later he was master of a small ship, visiting Iceland where he talked in Latin with the gentry and doubtless drank good American wine.

So, good reader, my memoirs may be as you please, a dream or fiction, but the story which forms its framework is good sound history, which you may read in the Eric Saga, the Flatey Book, the Eredweller's Saga and in passages of the Heimskringla—World Circle—of that great historian, Snorri Sturleson, these being authentic narratives not doubted except by idiots.

That is too mild. Suppose one wanted to know what happened in any average European county between the years 980 and 1000 A. D. Not one county in ten would produce a single fact. Yet at that time, for the District of Broadfirth in Iceland, we have the names and pedigrees, wives and children of all the clergy and squires, full record of their quarrels and adventures, vivid portraiture of their characters, appearance and clothing, a delightful picture of their meals, games, work and gossip, and perfectly accurate notes of their conversation.

From these amazing chronicles I have refreshed my memory of that time.

Below my window in this hospital, out on the Channel yonder, there are drifting belts of fog. Above them drives the sou'-wester, laden with heavy clouds. Far up in the blue of heaven float mists of the frosty cirrii. Just as I watch three cloud-planes, so I behold three lives. Illness and pain made all confused at first, until the Sagas helped me. And now the vision clears.

CHAPTER II

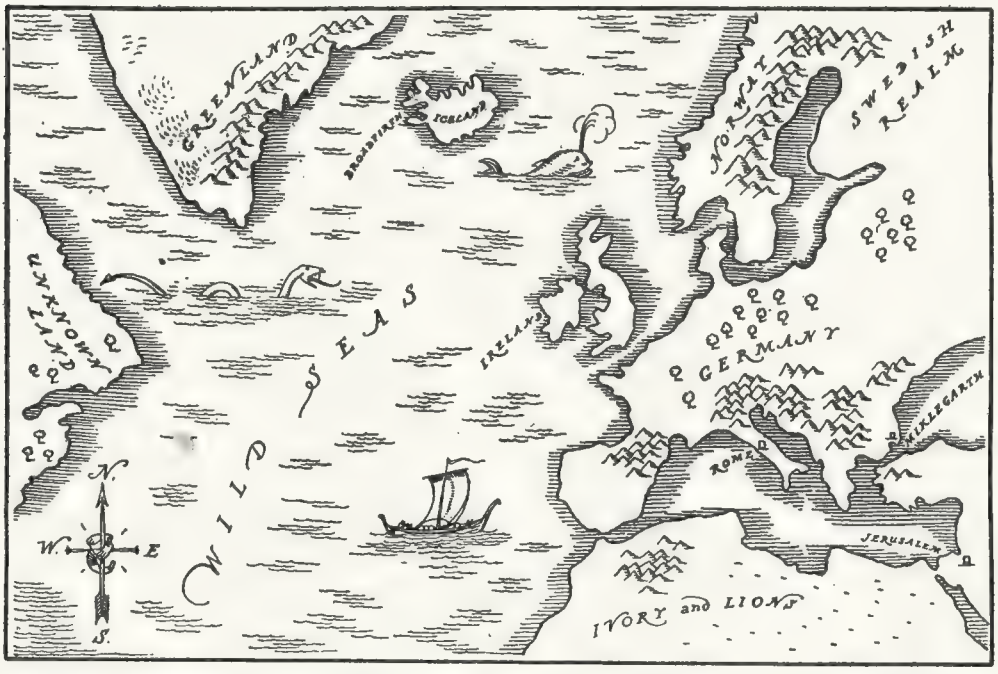
THE VISION CLEARS

FIRST shall you have the saga of my father, Eric the Red, fairest and noblest of all men in his time and country, and how he was married by my mother, the Lady Hilda.

Eric was son of Thorwald, lord of Yalderen in Norway. He had no pride in his peerage or ancestry of kings, but great delight in his descent from old Turf Einar, lord of the Orkneys, a man whose name is still a household word after a thousand years. For lacking fuel to keep his hearth-fire he, first of all men, invented the burning of peat. It is named turf after him. My grandsire Thorwald the Hersir merely killed a man in the way of argument, but through the venom of his neighbors was he banished about the year of Christ 965. He had an aged but roomy and profitable merchant ship, the *Fafnir*, and in this with his motherless child Eric he fled west over-seas, coming to Northern Iceland. By that time the colony

was overcrowded so the only land-take this runaway lord might have for himself and his seamen was Dranger in the Horn Strands. This place, not far from the Northwestern Horn of Iceland proved so bleak that Thorwald and half his people came to their deaths by wreck, famine or leprosy, and all who lived were poor. Lacking a crew and too young for command, Eric laid up the *Fafnir*, half-housed, half-buried, making the people buried ship. He spent a winter digging the old *Fafnir* from her grave, caulked, tarred and dighted her for sea. Those who were left of his father's men, including Patrick the Scald, came with him eagerly. They traded to Norway or when freights were low did some wayside ravaging for gold and slaves along the English. So came much honor and no little wealth.

Now I must show you how two very



take oath upon his father's name never to use her timbers even to warm their hearths. For all their poverty they kept that faith.

Eric followed the sea as boy in a ship owned by Gunnbiorn, son of Ulf the Crow. As he gained strength he rose to be seaman, oar-partner, bowsman, boatswain, and lastly steersman, second in command. It was in those days that the ship, storm-driven from the Snowfel Ness westward on the main sea, found the Gunnbiorn Skerries outlying a great and unknown land beyond the World-edge.

Now, grown to manhood and pride of seamanship, a gainful trader and a man of substance, Eric bethought him of his large bays form the west coast of Iceland and the northern of these is Broadfirth. The southern arm of Broadfirth is Hvammsfirth, and at the head of this lies Hawksdale where Eric resolved to settle between voyages. He bought the level bench-land on a hillside and there his English thralls built Ericstead.

It so happened in the early summer when Eric fared to Norway with the *Fafnir* that his house thralls, at their labor on the bench-land, started a landslide which fell upon the farm of his neighbor Valthiof. On this a kinsman of this Valthiof, by name Eyolf the Foul, went up the ruined hillside and there for his own honor and glory slew four of Eric's thralls.

It was an ill-mannered act that Eyolf should so take the law in his own hands. When he came home Eric saw into this matter, which spoiled his peace of mind. Therefore he slew Eyolf the Foul and also Dueling Raven, two men who could well be spared. His farm had been wrecked, his thralls murdered, but now he felt more at peace. Of course the kinsmen brought a blood-suit against him, as they were bound to do for their self-respect, but when the trial came on they only got what we should call a farthing damages.

As to his banishment from Hawksdale, Eric had naught to keep him there, so he brought his house timbers down to lade the ship at Hawk's Haven. If you would see him there think of him as a young sea captain, his beard not grown yet, his shoulders wrapped in the streaming splendor of that bright chestnut hair for which he was surnamed the Red. His features were straight, blunt, stern, eyes flashing blue, skin deeply tanned. He stood about six foot two, deep-chested, lean at the hips, springy and hard, of most gigantic strength. He would wear the deep blue clothing of seafaring men in all ages, shabby, most likely, of hose and kirtle; and he would be very plainly armed. He was ever the blithest, heartiest of bluff sailors, and if he had a hard edge in command, and came to a sharp point in business—so do men forge weapons, so do the gods forge men.

NOW may I come to my mother's story and the days when she was a maid, dwelling in Hawksdale, near-by where the ship was lading. The lady Hilda was a daughter of Eyolf the Gray, a farmer, first-born son of a famous law-man, Thord, the Yeller, at that time the greatest chief in Broadfirth. Thord's great-grandmother was the Christian Queen, Aud the Deep-minded, that most noble lady who in her eld amid ruin and exile founded with her twenty seamen the settlement north of Hvammsfirth. Her sire was Ketil Flat-nose. Her husband was King Olaf the White, who had conquered the Province of Dublin in Erin. In that stock, the mightiest of the Vikings, Olaf's great-grandsire, was Sigurd Worm-in-Eye, whose glance was like that of a dragon. He was son of Ragner Hairy-breeks, son of Sigurd, King of the Wick or southern bight of Norway.

"Great slayers all," said mother. "There should be a saga about the wives who put up with their tantrums."

When Hilda was quite a small child she ran from home, because she did not like her family—none of her choice, she said. Jorund adopted her, whose wife was Birry the Ship-breasted, so named for her ample bosom, a woman filled with love. With these my mother grew to womanhood, and since her own sire did naught for her but send rude messages she passed for their true daughter.

"And so I would have been," she told me, "but the fairies who sort out babies are overwrought and muddled, sending them to wrong housen."

Next, of her wedding Eric, hear her version:

"This Eric? At that time he was lading his house-timber for flight from Hawksdale, shouting at men who stowed cargo, 'Ahoy there forward! Yes, you with the squashed face, by Thor!' Oh, yes, he was well enough to look at in a way, although, d'ye know, I like the dark ones better, yes, and a black beard an' it comes to kissing. Pleased with himself, too!

"But what he saw in Katla beats me altogether. Fat lump! Oh, she was vowing aloud that she'd wed him, telling everybody—the shameless hussy! Of course there are always minxes about, but the way she set her dirty cap at Eric, grinning, prancing, ogling, making such a fool of herself my dear—and so coy. Ugh! A common little cat and, mark you, daughter of a witch!

"Not that I loved Eric. No. You see I had better offers. Besides, my foster parents had a likely man in treaty. I didn't want Eric, but I just made up my mind that Katla shouldn't get him, not if I had him kidnapped. A witch's daughter! Faugh!

"And so," she sighed, "I ran away with

the man. Oh, well. It can't be helped. But my grandsire, Thord the Yeller! My father, Eyolf! They've been in such a a frightful rage ever since that my skin creeps goosey when I think of them. I'm getting used to Eric, more or less—as chickens get used to fleas. What we possess, worthless or even painful, we value for mere having."

WHERE Hvammsfirth opens on Broadfirth her mouth has teeth chewing the strong tides. Close to the south shore is South Isle. Next is Broke Isle, so named for its broke grass. Third is Ax Isle. The three are tide-scoured fragments of an old lava flood, and were not settled until Eric bought them. On the north flank of Ax Isle is an inlet called Eric's Creek, and at the head of this he built the new Ericstead. But in the first years, while the wild land was tamed and the house building, my parents lived in the *Fafnir*. And I was born at sea—I, Leif the Fortunate.

Our house in Ax Isle was so big that one could not see its length or breadth or height because of the peat reek. Along the middle of the floor was a line of hearths where open fires burned under the smoke-holes of a blackened roof. On either side of the long hearth stood a row of benches, and in the middle of each row was a chair of state. The throne on the north side was Eric's high seat so its posts had carven heads of Thor and Odin to guard him, to guide his justice and to bring him luck. When one climbed up into the throne one faced the long, low south wall, with sconces for torches on the posts and a great array of racks for arms on the panels. At either end was a porch of two stories. The lower porch-floor was a lobby with inner and outer sets of sliding doors. The upper stories of the porches were storage lofts, one for stock fish the other for meal and salt.

No visitor could get in through the barred doors unless he called upon the master of the house. Moreover, while the guest was passed through the outer doors to shed his weapons and snowshoes in the porch, there was full time for the master to arm his men for the welcome.

The western or man's door on the right had beautiful door-posts carven with trolls, and other fairies who guarded us. The eastern, or women's door was small, leading to the bower or fire room, an out-building where the women, at their spinning, weaving or tailoring said a great deal I was too young to hear. Inward to the house this bower door gave on the dais where was the women's cross bench. In the midst of that stood my mother's noble throne carven with figures of Frigga, Queen of Heaven, and Freya, the goddess of Love and Beauty. Mother always had a deal of trouble with Freya, who neglected to make her beautiful.

Behind the cross bench and my mother's throne the east gable wall was broken by the broad entry into an apse or temple. Upon the god-shelf, all round the wide half circle of this holy place, were ranged my grandsires' wooden dollies, and in the midst stood their altar. Upon the altar lay the silver arm-ring with its two spirals or volutes of thick wire which is the Odin sign. This was the Odin-ring of my father's priesthood on which all oaths must be sworn. In front of the altar stood the big bronze bowl for blood and the whisk for sprinkling. If I touched these, or even set foot in the temple I was smacked with what my mother called the sacred slipper, kept there for that rite. Afterward that slipper became quite useful, a great littering place for kittens.

Eric was not a truly temple priest, because this shrine was only a chapel of ease to the great Thor's Cathedral of Holy Fell in Thorsness. If Snorri the Priest there was rated Bishop, my father's rank was—let us say lance-curate. Our shrine was good enough for little prayers, sacrifices to meet small occasions. It gave my father Chiefship of the Isles.

Near the temple apse on the north wall was a locked bed, or bunk with sliding panels. There Humph our pet seal slept with me, my brother Thorwald and the baby twins from the time they left their

cradle. We all slept in a heap and outside the bunk upon the dais floor lay Tyrkir our nurse, a thrall from the southlands.

This German was a tiny man like a gnome, small-featured, with sparkling restless eyes, pot belly and weedy limbs—a wonderful craftsman but a miserable object. Father bought Tyrkir at a remnant sale which followed the slave auction at Portchester, a Roman port in England. He claimed to have been a warrior and a man of the highest culture before he fell among savages. He called us "natives."

Behind my father's great chair the north wall of the house was broken by the door of a little chamber where Eric and mother slept. There were locked beds for people of condition, but thralls slept on the house-floor.

MOTHER sat in her carven chair, looking straight at me, I thought, until I saw her nodding and knew that she had dropped off to sleep. She was a gaunt, large-featured woman, man-like and awkward in her strength, roughened with labor, care-worn, tired out. Always she would laugh at herself and at everybody else, taking her troubles as a joke. But now that she sat alone she looked haunted. As the hearth fire flickered, her black shadow flapped against the wall and beams like the wings of Care.

Then while I watched through the crack of the bunk door she wakened with a start, looked at the distaff, at the spinning wheel and her foot upon the treadle. She had fallen asleep at her work. Now she stood up and came toward the apse stretching herself while she yawned at the wooden dollies all in a row on the god-shelf. It is rude to yawn in the faces of the gods.

Still worse, she picked up Freya in both hands, and slammed her down, face to the wall.

"Take that," she said out loud. "You can't make my face uglier than your own. So there!"

I had always thought that mother was so religious!

She stood for a while facing the room, and in the red flicker, through blue levels of smoke, like clouds, one could see where the indoor servants lay amid the rushes and bones upon the floor.

Mother was looking upward making runes with her fingers while she walked zigzag as though she chased a mosquito. Her hands wove awful incantations. It made my skin creep and my hair lift as I watched. At last she said quite loud:

"Pig hams, seventy-eight, and three. Mutton hams? let's see—" She was counting smoked meat on the beams—"Yes. And thirty-eight long tons of stockfish makes—"

She walked to the fire, adding up on her fingers and then came back to the god-shelf. Reverently she set Freya to rights and knelt down to say her prayers.

"Goddess of Beauty! When thou hast fed the beasts and menfolk, not to mention pigs, hast spun, and wove, and made, and washed their dirty clothes—oh, they are grubs!—hast finished all the milking, cheese and churning, done the smoked fish, and redded up the house—of course thou hast time to look perfectly lovely, eh? I haven't.

"Immortal Beauty, I'm falling off. D'ye hear that?" She picked up Freya and gave her a good shaking. "Wake up, then! Don't you hear, goddess? My hair is coming out, and a raven flew off with my combings. —— the bird! And I wish you'd mind me of the runes for charming away this toothache. I've clean forgot them. Besides I'm short of salt and if I send, there's nobody I can trust to stay sober. If only Leif would grow!

"But Thorwald just drives me frantic mooning around with hiccups. Drat the boy. And what's the use of twins? When one hath done an outrage I always smack the other, to make sure.

"And today I caught that Tyrkir giving beer to the twins, so he shall thirst till Yuletide. Beer to my babes! What d'ye think of that?" She picked the goddess up and slammed her down with a

bang. "If you made yourself half so useful as I am, you'd be ashamed of grinning on that shelf. You ornament! There! I feel better.

"By the way, goddess, just to please thee I've washed in milk for a month now, so you might attend to my skin, dear. Oh, send my skin clear and ruddy against my man's home-coming, and I'll treat you so much better. Indeed I will."

'Twas then she broke down and sobbed outright.

"My man! My man!" she cried. "Away since Gang Day and no word of him! Oh, spare him for my children's sake, great gods! Have mercy, for I grow cruel to my poor servants and peevish with my bairns. Thou, whom we dare not name, seeing us poor clouds drive down the wind, wasting in tears, have mercy!"

I DREAMED that my little brother Thorwald had come with me, ever so far. We had reached at last to the very foot of the great rainbow, and he would come no farther; yes, hung back even from the bridge which leads us straight to the god's home.

"I daren't! I daren't," he cried. "Heimdall will turn us back with his sword because we have not shed blood."

"Come on," said I, pulling him up with me. "When Heimdall tries to turn us back we've only to run upon his sword to die, and that gives right of way into Valhalla."

So we climbed up the rainbow, such steep miles, into the very sky. The slope was not so steep now, but the path upon the rainbow arch all slippery and shaking under us. Thorwald was frightened, dragging worse than ever, crying for his hell shoes. Up at the very top of the rainbow path rose Heimdall's glittering, silver palace shining as sunshine does on a veil of rain. If we could only reach his gates the bright god would give us passage by way of the sword, but I was oh, so weary with Thorwald's dragging!

He dared not look up at the white glory, but kept staring through the transparent quivering path down into ice-walled deeps of mist, and bottomless darkness.

"Don't look," I warned him. "Don't look down! See, dear, up yonder! The bright god is waiting with the sword of light to give us death and god-speed."

But Thorwald was so awkward! He must needs lurch into me with all his weight so that I lost my foothold on the edge. I was falling and falling, trying not to scream as I fell, and fell—

I woke up in a sweat of terror, knowing I had not screamed. 'Twas Thorwald I'd left shrieking up there on the bridge. So this was the bottomless darkness, and yonder thread of light must be the crack of hell's awful doors. I reached out groping toward the thread of light and found out that I wasn't dead at all, but safe home in bed.

Here was my brother Thorwald fast asleep with our pet seal in his arms and close beside me the small twins. The thread of light which had so frightened me marked the closed sliding panel which formed the door of our bunk. I pushed it open and looked out into the smoky hall.

Just under the panel lay Tyrkir our nurse. He snored just like a pig. I climbed out and lowered myself from the bunk edge, jumping clear of him. Then I ran to the hearth and cuddled by the fire.

Mother must have been very angry before she went to bed, because she had put poor Freya in the swill tub. It was the dead middle of the night, and up in the window shutters snow lay in lines of white upon the slats. Some snow was drifting through into the room, and sprinkled the blankets in which our thralls lay sleeping.

It seems that mother must have been awake, for presently she walked out of her bed place wrapping a bearskin round her, and came to warm herself beside the fire.

"Back to your bed," she said, but when I told her I was watching for father she let me sit on her lap in her big chair, sharing the bear-skin. Also she took the neck string with its golden bead, which belonged to Freya and put it round my neck.

"Wouldn't you like a lot more beads, eh, son?"

"Yes."

"Then you shall earn them one by one for everything you learn. There shall be one for reading and making runes, one for swimming and one for quarterstaff."

"Mayn't I have one for fencing?"

"Yes, and one for wrestling. Then there's the ax work, shoeing the horses, riding, driving a dog team, skating—and yes, when you beat father at chess, and win your first goal at the ball game. There shall be ever so many."

"Knots and splices," said I, "hand, reef and steer, reading the sun and stars to make the ship go, and—"

She hugged me closer. "Must you go to sea?"

"Of course. I'm going to be a man."

"My foster brothers," she answered angrily. "They'd go to sea, and naught would stop them. So the dogfishes got them. What was the good of giving my love to them? Your father would go to sea and naught would stop him. The dogfishes will get him. So what's the use of giving my love to him?

"When you grow up shall the fishes get you, son?"

"Mummie, when I was ever so little, long, oh, ages ago, and father was steersman of a ship—"

"Why that was years before you were anybody in the anywhere."

"What was I, mummie?"

"You were a nobody in the nowhere, sonny, playing at whatd'ye callums with a thingumijgig for howd'ye-callits."

"And the storms drove father's ship for days and days out to the west—overseas beyond the main ice until he saw ever so high mountains, ranges and ranges. When I grow up I'm going there and I'll take father. You may come too."

"It's in your blood." She laughed, and it was sad, like crying. "And in mine too. The gods have made me big and awkward, more man than woman, just as much a fool as any of my sailors. Yes, I suppose I'll be a fool and go." Then the look came to her eyes, for she was fey at times, seeing the future. "You'll find the mountains, aye, another world, without being a groat the better or a bit the wiser. Only I shall lose you." She pulled me fiercely, aside from where the gods looked at us. "And yet," she called in anger to the gods, "you'll never get my firstborn! Oh, what's the use of loving you, Leif? It's wasting love. For when you go you'll tear my heart out. I'll give the gold bead back to Freya. She's ugly enough to need an ornament, but I'm done with you and loving."

I clapped my small hand on her face to stop her. But she kissed the hand which struck her in the mouth.

"It's foolishness," she said. "Starved heart crying for what it has already, and you won't be off to sea for long years yet. So, please the pigs, I've still ten years of you. Yes, and it's worth while, though you're a gift for dogfish. And in that string about your neck there's magic, for as you earn the beads you're going to make them. Yes, and they'll make you the sort of man who isn't sent to the dogfish."

I know now what she meant. For, in the making of beads and pendants as trophies for each art and craft I learned, I was to be the best smith of our household—as if mere craftsmanship could keep a sailor's son at the hearthstone!

Perhaps both mother and I were drowsy with the warmth as we sat beside the peat, and caves of fire burned their roofs away. Faint as a cat's whisper through the muffling snowfall and the airs which sighed in the shutters came clank of oars in rowlocks, of many oars in stroke.

"Oh, listen, mummie!"

"What's wrong, my son?"

"Oars! I hear oars!"

I felt her quickened heart-beats.

"Oars?"

"Don't you hear? They're unshipping the figurehead lest it bring bad luck to the home."

Clank, clank, clank, very faint, drowned in the breathing of our thralls asleep.

Clank, clank, clank, and then a thread of voice.

"Now handy with them brails!" *Clank, clank.* "Brail in!"

And mother said:

"Be still! I thought I heard—"

"Stand by!" came the faint call, a little nearer now. "Stand by to let go! Leggo!"

"It can't be," mother whispered, but she had risen, shaking me off. She ran and fished the goddess out of the slop pail.

"In bow." *Clank, clank.* "Now easy larboard, pull steerboard—easy all!"

Mother was on her knees praising the gods.

"Way, enough!"

Old *Fafnir's* nose was hissing up the slipway, to a crash of oars housed inboard, which roused our household. I could hear the seamen splash overboard to man the shieldstrake.

"Way heave! Thor aid! Walk her up me hearties! Way, away—awaie!" The ship was being walked up clear of the tides. "Thor—aye! Thor aye! Hurray!"

So came three ringing cheers in thanks to Thor.

The house-carls were in a bustle getting supper and passing the hearth flame on from torch to torch, but the maids had captured mother to put on her robes and jewels, yes, even while she was busy getting beer to fill the master's horn. Between them the beer spilled, and that called for hurried apologies to the gods.

"You clumsy sluts," cried mother. "Pardon them, great gods. They're shameless lazy! You with the song of welcome! If you make the dogs howl I'll have you sacrificed! S'elp me where's my hair comb? Where's— Then fish it out of the beer, you silly besom! Tyrkir, you get the mead-cured ham for the master. Oh, how can I curse you when my mouth's full? The seal! Making off with that pie!"

With the hair brush mother slapped the tiring maids and Tyrkir swashed the seal with a cold-boiled ham.

Father was in the man's door roaring with laughter while he stamped the snow from his sea-boots, and shook himself like an ice-bear. The torchlight was aflame on his shirt of mail and his great steel helm. As for me, I had run stark naked to take his sword, bearing it before him as he entered. Mother came sweeping on in her gold robe to bring him his horn of beer. All had gone well but for Humph, who was clapping his flippers and shouting directly in mother's way. When she picked herself up afterward the horn of beer was empty, so she threw herself into father's arms and sobbed.

CHAPTER III

OF WINTER, AND THE HEARTH, THE FORGE AND THE ROPE

TOWARD midwinter we had only two or three hours of day when the slush lamps were out, the fires burned low, our people were away tending the beasts or hauling fuel, or fishing through the ice, and we children had the great hall to ourselves. The twins were ever busy squabbling in their corner, but Thorwald and I led warring hosts in battle, or Humph defended the high seat against all comers, We played the old games too —blindman's buff, tag, hunt the slipper, kiss in the ring, puss in the corner, football rounders and every noisy kind of let's pretend. After the light waned the grown-ups clattered home, leaving their clogs in the porches, kindled the meal fires, and set out the trestle tables. Then the men would gossip round the fires while the women cooked.

After the meal, of course, the women worked in their bower, and the men at the fireside made clogs or whittled arrows. Outside in the dark the ice groaned and scathed along the channels. Up in the roof the little winds would croon or the big storms yell and bellow, while flurries of snow swept down into the smoke, and eddies caught up white ash from the hearth. That was the good hour when Patrick the Scald told sagas, or sang lays to his clucking harp. Or sometimes father sat in the high seat with Thorwald

on one knee, me on the other, and the score of children gathered round, while he told us all about everything, and hero tales of Norway. Would I could show him to you—ruddy, hearty, bluff, a great strong sailor-man, sea-master and merchant.

"Now," saith he, "you shall have the say about the great-grand-uncles of your mother's house.

"First came Ingolfr Ern's son in flight from Harold Fairhair, lord of Norway, seeking a land where there should be no king. And when he came nigh to this land he took the posts of his high seat, carven with figures of the gods, and cast them overboard. Where the gods were pleased to swim ashore, that was the place for his land-take. But dirty weather came on so that the gods got lost. Then did the people perch on Ingolfrshofde just like a row of sea fowl—cold-stricken, woe-begotten, god-abandoned, in a filthy temper. Yet when they had wintered, and homed to Norway, Ingolfr would not own he was beaten, but made a fine tale to his Cousin Leif. So he set out again and Leif came with him.

When Leif saw Ingolfr's land-take and made sport of him, so that Ingolfr spat like a wet cat, these cousins parted. Leif sailed along the south shore, and up the west shore until he rounded Snow-Fell cape into this Broadfirth. But when he would throw his dollies overboard to swim ashore, Leif remembered Ingolfr's trouble. Therefore he oiled his dollies to keep them warm in the water. So the gods were pleased. For the dollies made smooth patches in the sea, showed Leif which way he should fare, and brought him to a haven where there were fires ashore at a stead of Irish monks. With them he wintered."

"What are monks?" I asked.

"Christ-priests, who told your great-grand-uncle how they had fled from women and the devil to be in a state of pilgrimage no matter what port they fetched. Moreover they said that far away west beyond the main sea there are more monks in a land which is called Great Ireland. That land must be full of monks by this time—if so be that they breed.

"In the spring Leif could not think what he should do with his monks, and so he sacrificed them to the gods. Afterward he was sorry he had wasted them when there was work to do, so he fared with his ship to Ireland for some more.

"He ravaged in Ireland and brought home some Irish to be thralls. In his high seat, a chair just like this, he had his bane, for they killed him. Aye, that was great scathe, for they took his ship and squared away for Ireland."

Thorwald was asleep, so father carried him to the bunk and chucked him in. Then I had Eric to myself to stand upon his knee and pull the waves of his red-gold glistening hair.

"When you were steersman, sir, and sailed beyond the main ice and the berg stream to that land of mountains—was that Great Ireland?"

"Nay, Great Ireland's away to the southward. There too is St. Brandon's Isle which was found by Welshmen."

"But of the mountain country. Why didn't you go ashore?"

"I was not master. I served with Gunnbiorn, son of old Ulf the Crow. But some day, Leif, let's take young Humph for pilot."

"Humph cares for naught but fish."

"Hush. If he hears the word fish he'll bark and set the twins at squabbling. Humph and you and me shall fare into that unknown world. There may be money in it."

"Shall we take mother?"

"Hush! Your mother hates the sea. Now it's your bed-time, sonny. Say your gods. There, looking toward the god shelf yonder—"

"Odin."

"And what saith Odin?"

So I began to say my catechism:

"'Frail man,' saith the king of Heaven, 'be brave and tell the truth. Own no man master for I alone am king. Waste not thy little strength in vice. Respect the elders. Welcome every stranger. Help

the poor. Be cheerful. Find contentment.' "

"Luff, son. Now what saith Odin's wife, the queen of Heaven?"

"Frigga looks after mother."

"Aye and spins vapors." He sighed. "Now what of Thor—he with the hammer?"

"He is the sire of Northmen, strength of workers and fighters, skill of craftsmen, and his words are deeds."

"He of the one arm?"

"Tyr. Honor of warriors."

"Pray ever to him. And Bragi?"

"All eloquence and poesy and song."

"'Ware Brag, my son, and don't you let his braggarts get to windward of you."

"Idun is the spring-time.

"Niord is the summer, guarding all seamen and fishers. Please, Niord, bless my father and make me a seaman!

"Uller is winter who gives us skates and snowshoes, archery and hunting."

"And the son of Niord?"

"Frey, thou art sunshine, king of all the Fairies, god of Norsemen, hope of captives, giver of liberty and weal and peace!"

"Freya?"

"Love o' women."

"Forsati?"

"Truth and justice."

"Heimdall?"

"Wisdom and knowledge, guarding all the gods."

"Hermod?"

"Their messenger."

"Vidar?"

"Eternal substance."

"Vali?"

"Everlasting Light. He that believeth not in wisdom, truth and love, in the honor of warriors, in honest work, in valor and straight dealing hath denied these gods and turned his face away from the All-Father. Amen."

"Belay son! Coil down! Such is the faith which Christians would capsize, such the good honest gods which mass-priests say are devils. May Odin strike you manly, and Thor hammer you into a gentleman! Now off with you to bed."

IT IS odd to note how the least little smell calls up great gusts of memories. To-day a whiff of cod-liver oil brought back the shark-oil slush-lamps hung from smoky beams above the anvil, the glow of the forge fire under its black cowl, the flame-lit figure of Thor above the drift snow filtering through the doorway. There in the flame glow, and the snow mist stood out two savage Scots thralls, naked save for their grimy kilts, swinging great hammers with a chant to Thor, while Smith's wand pointed to where each blow should fall. Frogan's name, I mind me meant, "Cheerful with whisky," and his sister Kissick was named for a nymph whose home is a spring not far from Inver's Ness. As they two pumped the bellows, they snarled at one another in their Gaelic.

When they were sprinkled most of our folk were named in Thor's honor. Thus with Thorod and his wife Thurid who dwelt in the little house behind the stithy, and their four sons, Stein-thor, Thorald, Thorest and Thorolf. If I gave all true names you would soon pitch my book in the fire. As a matter of fact we kept these names for Thor, and used the nicknames. Our smith, being second in command of the *Fafnir*, was known as "Steersman Smith." His eldest son was "Hot-black" who wrought the year round in the forge, and washed for the yule-feast. The second son grew up to be "Hall the Hunter," a stout and swarthy giant who never came near the forge and did not use his tongue except for cursing. The other two worked when they had to, and hungered when nobody fed them, so that their lives were short and their rest lengthy.

Smith had been steerman in my grandsire's time, and his sons were born during the years of famine in the North before my father dug the ship from her grave. Through the long winters Smith and Hot-black wrought with the Scots thralls for servants, making ship's bolts, and horse-shoes. Tyrkir, our nurse, was a great armorer when it came to forging of weapons. The swords of those days used

to bend, so that, in any fighting, one had to draw off between bouts and straighten the blade on the nearest rock with one's foot. The spear and arrow points also seemed to be bewitched, because they never flew quite where one expected. Yet Steerman Smith was very far from blaming his fellow craftsman Tyrkir. Indeed Smith worshipped this little thrall who looked so like a real troll out of the under world. The German was supposed to have magic powers in all he did with metals, and used to bully Smith. It was not Tyrkir's fault that shields could be split and shirts of mail cut with a sword stroke, or that swords bent, and arrows went awry. So Smith explained, wagging his grizzled beard over the neatest work done in the forge.

"This metal is good Norse iron," said he, "from Trandsheim mines, all made and gathered by the little folk who live in the under world. I am true Norse with blood of freeman in me, good as your'n, young master. Only the luck's wanting, because in the naked length and breadth and depth of Iceland there ain't never no trolls to help. There's no Little People in Iceland, whether they be trolls, gnomes, pixies, sprites or aye kind of fairies. 'Cause why? There ain't no metals! Trolls and metals runs together by nature, but what would such be doing here?" He swung his wand to the mountains circling Broadfirth, dim white volcanoes hid in the Arctic night. "Them Yokulls or Yotuns, giants of ice and fire which made this giant's home, what did they do to your mother's Uncle Thorwald Far-sailing, or my brother Yf and all them other wayfarers? Ate 'em! Took 'em by the head as you takes shrimps, and ate their bodies off. And if trolls or any of them little people was fools enough to settle here the giants would catch and eat 'em same as shrimps. That's why swords won't bite and spears fly daft, all cause there ain't no trolls helping our craftsmen."

"But why don't the giants eat us?"

Smith pointed to Thor's head.

"That's why," he answered. "Them spirits of evil is frighted of Thor's hammer, Milner, which shatters mountains same as I crush iron. Christians is hopeful to drive Thor from Iceland and if they do, you mark my words, young sir—the giants will get us and we'll be ate like shrimps. You wait and see."

"But, Smith—the gods must die in any case. What then?"

"At the last day," he answered, "in the twilight of the gods, the Wolf Fenris shall eat great Odin, ay, and Odin's eight-legged horse. Then shall Thor slay the sea-snake Yermungandr and shall be drowned in venom from her mouth.

"So shall these Ice and Fire Giants make a meal of us poor Icelanders—taking us by the head to bite our bodies off."

There was always something cheery about Smith.

FOR her winter quarters our ship lived in the Naust, a slipway under a closed shed. The gravel cooking hearth upon her keelson carried a fire to keep the whole place warm, and from the roof swung slush lamps. In the poop cabin dwelt our boatswain, Patrick.

Now when my grandsire Thorwald fled from Norway, far upon the main sea out towards Rockall, he found a dinghy adrift, wherein a young man lay dying of thirst and famine. Nursed back to life—this sailor could speak no Norse, but only Erse—in the sorrowful music of his harp he conveyed a tale of fighting, a fierce battle, defeat, flight, loneliness, despair. In dress, in bearing, this lost man was a chief, in his art a musician. He proved to be skilled in seamanship, a loyal friend to have, and when he learned our tongue, most amusing company. He served as seaman, afterward as boatswain and might have risen to steersman or even master but for one suspicion ever attached to him. He was a Christian. It seemed to Thorwald the Hersir and to my father who came after him that a thrall might worship anything he liked; but for a gentleman to stoop to such a creed was quite disgusting.

It was before my time that Patrick paid attention to a lass whose eyes reminded him of Erin. She dared him to marry her, and he would flinch from nothing. So he wedded with Helga the Shrew. After that he fell in love with the sea, and was only happy afloat. As to the wintering, he needed so much beer to comfort him that mother chased Patrick out of the house altogether. For that reason he dwelt in the ship, and even after the Shrew died in a fit of temper, would not move back to the house for fear he should be haunted.

As I knew him first the little man was middle-aged and bald, with straggling wisps of mud-hued hair down his shoulders. His face was clear-cut, noble, and beautiful, still ruddy, but beginning to shrink, with crows' feet round the eyes and humorous wrinkles. In age he withered like an old dried apple.

Now if I had much to learn from Steersman Smith, life was too short for all the lessons that I sought from Patrick as he sat there by the fire on board the *Fafnir*, a palm thimble on his hand, patching old boat sails or sewing new canvas, or making leather jerkins the winter through. From him I learned sewing in canvas and leather, the knots and splices, and the reading of sun and stars, tides, currents, sea flooms, weather, for he was master of all seamanship.

Hear his rede of the east winds:

Satan brings cold air, red splendor of dawning,
Clear wide horizon when no men shall fear
Rain-freezing, hail-driving, snow drown'd. Take warning—
Watch you for hurricane out of the clear.

And the rede of the west winds:

Westerly boisterous riot of cloud-strife,
Splendors at sundown, but thick the gray air,
Wrath without malice or spite against man-life,
West saith, "I fight you, yet always fight fair."

When Patrick and I were tired of lessons he would take his harp and sing in his little high voice ballads of Holy Erin. These full five centuries, so Patrick said, Erin had been the lamp which lighted the world in every art, craft, and mystery, in seamanship, in trade and Christian piety. In his own youth he had been far-traveled, making voyages to Jerusalem where his god lived a thousand years ago, to Rome, that city which once had ruled the earth, and even to that greatest of all wonders Micklegarth, or as one now says, Constantinople, capital of the world. These were good enough places it seemed, but not to compare with Dublin. He spoke of all the Northern world as overrun by us northmen, come out of Russ-land to infest and destroy Christ's realm, Vikings an' all entirely no less. I wish I could render his sweet brogue.

His native crannog was larger than our farm, a palace of gold and silver builded on wooden piles out on a lake. Single-handed, with his lone sword, Patrick defended the place against a whole fleet of Norse Vikings, their swords more in number than the grass-blades, raging and howling for his vitals. So sorely was he outnumbered that he withdrew his garrison in a squadron of shipping, taking refuge in the main sea where my grandsire found him. So now it was our glory to house him, a son of kings. I learned in after years that Ireland is inhabited by sons of kings, but there seems also to be a tribe of spalpeens.

So far as Patrick claimed his royalty the neighbors said that we were welcome to him, but they were bitter jealous that we should house a scald. Aesir of Swine Isle tried to lure him away from us with bribes, Easy-all Heliulf with unctuous flattery, and some of the mainlanders wrought plots to have him kidnapped. On such occasions, and also in the crisis of his marriage with the Shrew, and when mother chased him out of the house for making too free with the beer, Patrick would mope, sulk, and even make mournful dirges with which he filled the night until the dogs howled.

But if Patrick had his moods, there were times also when the maids vexed mother, and the house was not so peaceful as the Naust. So I would sometimes spend a night or two with Patrick, and

great fun we had together playing at house-wives. I always cooked the meals. It was at such a time that he gave me the lesson in splicing.

"Hi! bumble fingers! Is it a noose ye'd be making or a spider's web? 'Tain't for the learning ye are but morthered up to the eyes in native ignorance. Give over!

"Now Leif, an' ye'd be making an eye splice unlay the rope-end, so, and open it back a good hand's breadth. Thus have we three strands—mark them well—the Father, Son, and Spirit to help us in each rope on which men's lives depend. Lash then a whipping of one turn, so, to know the Father by. Render a whipping of two turns, thus, for the Son. Serve three good turns of whipping to hold the Spirit—so. That's done. There's Three in One for you.

"Next comes this marling spike which like the inquiring mind shall open up the lay. Thus. Now, placing the Son under thumb hold, tuck the Spirit through this, and you can leave the Father. Aye, many's the lesson taught by the triune rope—only it's pagan ye are, and next to brute."

"How can I learn unless you teach me, prince?"

"None o' yer blarney now."

"Rede me the riddle please, sir."

"My son, it means—oh, what doesn't it mean!—the simple three-ply faith, ten centuries old without being frayed or broken. It twists loose tribes of savages into Christian nations, a rope to hang false gods my boy, and makes rough brutes into immortal men. Aye, and it means the twilight of your gods, the Ragna rok, the Gotter-dammerung, the end of Thor and Odin."

"We know they shall end," said I, "but still they'll last our time."

"I'm doubting that. Your gods declare you shall not win to Valhalla except by slaying men."

"Aye, in fair fight!"

"And when you've all obeyed and killed each other, why there's an end of you and your religion."

That sounded true.

"And why? One of your gods in Asgard is Loki, the underground fire."

"Nay, not a god. We never worship Loki."

"Yet your gods had him as a guest to live with them, the principle of evil. So he corrupts the gods, that they do teach men foul and bloody crime in Earth and Heaven alike, and out of that very teaching the gods themselves shall perish by the sword.

"Now you'll be noticing that the three strands of this rope don't cut each other, don't kill each other like your blood-stained demons, but just add strength to strength."

While Patrick gave me this lesson in splicing, all unnoticed my father had entered the Naust, and come aboard the ship. Now we looked up to see him loom in the murk of the place terrible and gigantic. A sudden panic seized me and I bolted.

What father said to Patrick I never heard, but our poor boatswain limped, wept and swore for a whole week, devising a most horrible revenge. Of clay and spittle he made a doll, the image he said of Eric the Red. He stuck it full of needles, and presently my father was to be smitten with awful torments. Eric seemed none the worse—was shamming well, said Patrick—but never another word would the boatswain tell me either of ropes or gods.

CHAPTER IV

THE YULE LOG

THE other day a sudden whiff of farmyard called up the perfect memory of Ericstead. I might have been standing within that very hour at our main door, looking out on the deep mire of the barton. On the left behind the women's bower were the byre, dairy, sty and rickyard; and on the right the smithy, the ropeyard, and low boat-sheds beside the water. In front was the naust; behind it lay Eric's creek, winding away to the eastward round a bend. Outside our garth were fields, where sometimes oats would ripen,

giving us meal for porridge. We had home pastures also, fenced with lava walls. The rest of the isle was our hayfield.

Because my father was at sea in summer, mother ruled the farm. I wish you could have seen her at the haying while the men bent to their sickles, and behind them the lasses turned or gathered up the hay. She wore a broad straw hat but, as mosquitoes rose from the grass in clouds, she covered this with a fly-veil, which almost hid her face. Though father, as a seafaring man, had sea-blue hose and kirtle, mother and all the rest of us wore homespun. She had cowhide boots laced to the knee, because the flies would otherwise give her no pause, so she said, from scratching at her ankles. But what I remember in pain was father's walking stick, with ferule, band and head carven in silver. When mother thought we looked tired, we each got a hearty whack across the rump, which made the men grunt and the women skirl. The work went on so long as there was light, and the sun does hardly set in the Icelandic summer. In any case mosquitoes made sleep a vexation, save in the smoke of a house; but after meals we would drop off into a doze until the cane commenced its rounds, making us fresh and hearty. She served us oatmeal water in leather buckets, a drink which modern farmers might find useful both to men and horses.

Our bravest men would run from mother's wrath, and yet, if any one got hurt she would be surgeon, with tears running down her face until the patient had to comfort her. I have seen her blaze with rage over a dirty spoon, or be in a hurricane if the maids were lazy, but if her boat got swamped she thought that the rarest fun, and when the house caught fire, she made us laugh so much we could scarcely carry the buckets.

Save that we went armed, a modern farm hand might have come among us to drive the ox-wain, thatch ricks or milk the kine, without feeling much astray or having aught to teach in the way of improvements. We Icelanders prided ourselves in being a practical, hard-headed, gainful folk, most thoroughly up to date. We were the first colonials of the northern world, with a certain tender contempt for old-country methods in Norway. We were fiercely republican, despising the Norse Monarchy, which never ventured to hint to us of taxes. We held to the old gods as a matter of use and wont. Still was Woden's day held sacred to Odin King of Heaven, Thor's day to the god of the Northmen, Freya's day to the goddess of love and beauty, Loki's day was not yet called after Sataere—but these are but two names for the same rogue. Sol's day we kept for the sun, Mani's day for the moon, and Tyr's day for the god of honor. I saved my very best prayers for him. And yet while we held to the forms of the old faith, I doubt that actual worship was left to the women and children. Men were indifferent, counting the gods but shadows of themselves. The temples stood like rocks amid a rising tide of Christian faith destined quite soon to sweep them all away. Iceland was almost the last stronghold of the ancient gods, and even among us there were one or two Christian households.

While we took our temples as a matter of course, with the sacrifice of horses, eating of horse-flesh, and sprinklings of horse-blood, our real religion was in shipping and pride of seamanship. We coined to carry on our trade, such words as "see," and "mann," and "skib," which remain to-day in modern "sea man ship." Ours was the first sea trade to span the Atlantic; and I doubt if master mariners of to-day, crossing the Western Ocean without a chart, a sextant, chronometer or compass, would make their landfalls as we did without an error.

Memory plays queer tricks. Before I was thirteen winters old, my father took me in his ship on one of his voyages to Norway. I can remember nothing of the outward passage, yet recall most vividly the fair or cheaping at Hladir in Trendheimsfjord. It was there we bartered our cargo of fish-oil, stock-fish, eider-down, homespun, wool and salted sea-fowls'

eggs, for English salt, Danish beer, German mead, iron and tar out of Swede-realm, Norway pine, yew bow-staves, oak for ship repairs, dolls for the twins and a fine jewel for mother. What with the drinking-booths where sea captains met, the feasts, the gossip of the world, the sweets and toys, the shows at the fair, the ball game, the brawls, that month of excitement passed like a single day.

Again, of the homeward run I can remember nothing, until we set father ashore for his business with Neal the Wise, the chief at Bergthors Knoll. The Saga of Burnt Nyal is all about him, but it was long after my leaving Iceland that the poor gentleman with his wife and son were burned in their homestead by Flosi and the Burners.

From Bergthors Knoll my father would ride to Broadfirth, so he gave me pretense command to take the ship home. But I should tell you that even at twelve years old we Icelanders accounted ourselves men, and were so treated. I very soon proved to Steersman Smith that my command was something very different from pretense.

For we, being out on Mane Bay in a stiff sou'wester, sighted what seemed to be a boat in trouble. I bade the steerman run down for a nearer view, which brought us presently to a tree adrift, whose high upstanding roots had seemed to be a sail. Chips, our young carpenter whom we had shipped at the cheaping, claimed that this tree must come from Scythia, which lies northward of Swede-realm the Great*. There are very strong demons, and Hotblack Smithson warned us that, since no log so great had ever been seen before, this might well be a float of Ran's net, wherewith she catches seafaring men to their doom. Boatswain Patrick, being Christian and claiming this log for his devil, bade us beware of sin and put about.

"Pity," sneered the steersman, who hated Patrick, "this Christian scolds the devil instead of grappling."

"Stand by," said I, "to take the log in tow." But Smith claimed it would tear the ship asunder.

"Stop tacking," said I, "stand by the sheet! Luff!"

They laughed at me, so with the point of my whittle knife I pressed Smith's hand to the tiller.

"Now will you luff?" I asked, and up came the ship's head, nosing into the tree between trunk and roots.

"But, Leif!" cried the steersman, "What will your father say?"

"By Thor! He made me master!" I snatched my bow and quiver out of the after cabin. "Who says I'm not? Frogan!" this to the Scots thrall, who was always sullen. "Bend on your painter to the end of the hawser, or—" I drew the arrow head to my thumb. "Will you go to Ran below there, Frogan?"

"What's this?" The boatswain saw fit to interfere, so I whipped an arrow through his ear lobe.

"Out with the runner," said I, and he turned to. The argument abated.

So I ran forward and, as the ship's head rose on a black swell, I took a flying leap into the tree roots. The sea-wash swept above me, and far overhead as the ship reared bucking athwart the swell her red-jowled, white-eyed dragon's head looked down at me, surprized.

When Frogan threw me the painter, I passed it round the roots, and cast its end aboard. Then the men tailed on, running the painter aft until I had enough of the hawser out to reeve a bow line fast to the great roots. The log was ice-filmed, and as the seas raced under me, their sprays crusted my clothes with ice. Crying with pain and a labor beyond my strength, I got my bowline taut. Tame enough by this time, Patrick brought me the runner outboard along the shield-strake. He made that fast, while I swarmed back aboard, half drowned, along the hawser. And so by tailing on to the runner, we swung the ship, thus riding to the captured log as to a sea anchor, which kept us snug until the weather eased enough for towing.

Afterward, when we got the log up

* Russia.

Eric's creek, as far as the roots would float, my father—very stiff from his ride out of South Iceland—told everybody that for a joke he had put his boy in command. At the same time he warned the crew to take the jest as they found it.

" 'Tis as natural," he said, "for young chiefs to rule as for young birds to fly."

Patrick, like a bear with a sore ear, had much to say, but said it in Erse, which was safer than using Icelandic. Smith, with his hand in a bandage, backed me well, and on the whole there was no further trouble. I seem to remember though that on my coming home, with my new manhood still in tender bud, I must have a locked bunk to myself instead of sharing as heretofore with the children. Our nurse-thrall Tyrkir must needs be fussing about me as if I were still a child, but whenever he prowled within reach of my new bedplace, he would be seized from within, while with my finger and thumb he had his red nose flicked until he cried. In tears he told me that such things were not done among cultured people in Germany.

Having sold his Norway cargo—"worth less than Leif's log, by Thor!"—Eric laid up the *Fafnir* to winter. I mind also that he brought gossip from his ride across the mainland. He had heard for instance that old Thorgest Skinflint of Broadlair stead in Woodstrand had bought for Tind Scarface, his widowed son, a pretty new wife to tend the motherless children. He would be building a new house, so that might bring us an order for some of our drift timber. We were not surprized when, just as the ice was closing across the channels, such an order came. The messenger who brought us this good stroke of luck arrived from eastward, in which direction Thorgest's homestead lay, and he came in a dinghy which had Thorgest's marks.

This Irish thrall, speaking through Patrick as interpreter, told us that he was Michael Craftsman, skilled in the mystery of carving wood. He brought word that Thorgest had tidings of our great drift log, the news of which was current along the mainland. Thorgest desired the making of this timber into doorposts, high seats, and settles, to start a new home building for his son, Tind Scarface. The measurements given and the prices offered showed a good knowledge of the business pending.

Indeed, we were satisfied as to every detail, when Michael let fly with the astounding statement that he was to winter with us for the very purpose of carving the woodwork with figures of Christian demons. That men so truly respectable as Thorgest and Tind Scarface should stoop from their caste, and basely forsake the gods was horrible; and yet explained by Michael, who had rumors that the new wife for Tind was a rich Christian woman, who made the carvings part of her marriage bargain.

"Wit you well," said mother, "that either Skinflint or his son Scarface will sell his soul at a most reasonable price an' he gets cash."

"By Thor!" quoth Eric, "d'ye mind, wife, when we were building this house, and Skinflint had borrowed our outer daïs-boards? Give them back? When he could spare them! He misliked my sea manners—he would have the boards in payment for being sworn at. Oh, he was peevish, setting his people on me with swords. So I brought men and an ox-wain over the snow in a blizzard. We argued the point and fired the house, and brought away my boards."

"There were men slain?" I asked, eagerly.

"Oh, that was nothing—two on either side, so neither had any grievance to make a song of at the assize in Thorsness. Tind got his name of Scarface by my sword, but I paid for the wound in cash. You see, Leif, I had been banished from Hawkdale, so I would not foul my new nest here in Ax Isle by any suits at law.

"Now as to this order from Thorgest, Skinflint and I are good neighbors, saving when we bicker."

"Whoo!" said mother.

"Hear the mother owl!" quoth Eric. "Well, Leif, you shall know that Thorgest

lends money to the Woodstrand farmers. He sucks them dry, the old vampire, with such usury that they all of them come to me. I lend them money to pay their debts to Skinflint. Thus I have all the trade."

"Whoo!" said mother.

"Owl!" quoth father. "When Skinflint comes to pay me for this new order I'll bleed the old miser white—aye, that I will—giving the money to his ruined farmers, so that all men shall know I have wrought justice."

"Tweet!" So mother chirped, as she kissed him.

It was agreed then that Michael Craftsman, being himself a Christian, should be sworn to the truth of his message on all the holy demons in Christ-home. This oath he took without fear. Next we let make for each person of our household some charm or amulet, potent in fending off all evil spirits. Since the abhorred carvings might not be made in any respectable house where gods were present, the work must be done in a boat shed and the worker barred from the hearth. He would camp with Patrick. As to any bad luck, that would now fall upon Michael, who carved the figures, and on the evil persons who had ordered them. Finally, mother made Eric promise faithfully, that so soon as the ice was firm, he would send a runner on skis to get this message about the Christian carvings directly confirmed by Thorgest.

As to the safety of the ice, it was long after Yuletide before my father was quite satisfied, and ere he could send a message there set in the great snowstorm. Out of that storm we had a visitor, one of our seamen-partners, young Catface Æsinson. He brought tidings from our neighbor Æsir of Swine Isle, who had rescued out of the storm a badly frozen messenger of Thorgest. This messenger was afraid to come on to us at Ax Isle, but sent word that Thorgest added to his order. He wanted not only the Christian carvings already bespoken, but if our drift-log yielded sufficient timber he must have bunks, wainscots and a daïs. The size of the house was given, a scale of prices offered.

Catface took Eric's messages back to Thorgest's runner—that this contract would now take nearly a year to fill, but that by hard work, we hoped to make delivery ere the ice formed next autumn.

With that all doubts were at rest, except my mother's wager of all Gnashtooth's kittens that Thorgest would die of grief when the time came for paying.

Meanwhile in October we had commenced the work which was to change our fate.

For two months with axes, with wedge and hammer, we cut away at the log, and with adzes shaped the planks—there were no saws or planes for hundreds of years to come; and great did we find our treasure. Now Tyrkir, who did not put his red nose out of doors, except perforce, sat by the fire deriding Iceland. Down in our southwest province grew timber big enough for building boats, but here on Broadfirth we were hard put to it to get wood for charcoal. So Tyrkir spoke of forests.

In Germany, said he, they would take an old wheel, a Yule, and dress it with straw and tar, then on the mother night, the longest night of winter, it was set ablaze to roll down a hill into water. This Yule was token of the sun's bright chariot spinning across the sky—a symbol to comfort Northmen. Wheel we had none to spare, nor any hill in Ax Isle for the rolling, but surely the stump of our drift tree would make a noble wheel-log for our hearth. That rede seemed good, but try as we would we could not break our stump out of the harbor ice. So we sent to the seamen on their farms and to all our neighbors bidding them to the Yule feast. They came in on ski or with dog teams, and some with horses, until house and barn were thronged.

On the morning of the feast, very early, we got pack harness on the horses, making them fast to the tow rope with a bowline round the stump. So, all hands tailing on to a halliard chantey, we broke out the stump and snaked it along the harbor ice, then up through the snowy barton to the

main door. From thence we laid a snow road across the house floor, perched Patrick with his harp upon the stump, and brought such a Yule log home as never before was seen in Iceland. It well nigh fired the roof.

So much being done, of course we must have the usual Boar of Atonement to honor Frey, or there had been no luck for a whole year. There were no wild boars, but a tame pig obliged, being roasted before the log. Hence, with music and dancing, the sacred dish was brought to the table. Eric, followed by each of us men in turn, laid the right hand on its head, swearing defense of the house —an oath we should presently remember when days of trouble came. We did not neglect eating.

In any household where there dwelt a scald he would compose a Yule song in the master's honor, and the same doggerel served for many feasts. Here is Patrick's stave:

"For Eric's hame, and Eric's mate,
For Eric's hame, and Eric's sons,
I pledge right health, I pledge good ease,
I pledge great wealth, I pledge fair peace,
So may the flame of this bright hearth
Gild Eric's fate, and light his path!"

Now must the scald have first taste of the Yule ale, but Patrick would not notice my mother or see the steaming horn, for now his face was aglow, his eyes were fey, and the gift of far sight came suddenly upon him. We waited breathless, while he sat strumming chords until the words took shape, and the song stirred in him.

"A long-ship fares on seas afire,
A son shall dare beyond desire,
And Christ-realms out of darkness won,
Shall bless thy name, Leif Eric's son."

Eric sat in the high chair scowling wrathfully at him, while Patrick seemed to waken from a dream.

"By Thor! You make my son a Christian cur!" he shouted.

"I know not what I said!" The scald stood fearless, face to face with Eric. "Who are you," he cried, "that you should dare dispute a rede of the All-Father?"

But mother laughed at her man's anger, "Yule should be merry," she said. "Come, Patrick, try the ale."

Patrick bowed low and took the horn, but turned his back upon the god-shelf which he should face, pledging the fourteen great gods eastward in Asgard.

"This time," he said, "I'll not betray the Christ. Yet I'm no spoil-sport."

My father liked his courage.

"Pledge your own gods. Let's all have our ale."

"Making forby," said Patrick, "the sign you're pleased to call Thor's hammer —crosswise so—to rid the good ale of all heathenry, and I'll be drinking to your Apostles yonder." He swung to face the gods. "Here's to St. Peter, and himself has the keys of Heaven!" He drank. "Girt shamus!" He drank. "St. John!" And so he pledged his gods. The best of pagans got no more ale than Patrick, or more joyfully drunk.

While Patrick pledged his gods both inner and outer doors of the main porch were slid wide open, and with a whirl of snow there entered a visitor. He was seated in a carriole drawn by dogs, and attended by running thralls on snowshoes. All our men had sprung to their weapons, but now the thralls helped their master out of the carriole and also produced from behind it a led pig, whose yells and screams had well-nigh caused a panic in the house. Now came the guest, shaking the snow from a cowled gown of scarlet, trimmed with furs, for all the world like our good Father Christmas. It was only when he threw the hood back that we knew the large-nosed, big-boned, sallow face, and bleak red hair brushed back from a bald forehead, of my father's dearest friend, the famous Slaying Stir.

With all the love in my heart I call to mind this masterful, lawless gentleman, so sad of face, so full of humor. He had grave gray eyes, direct, sincere, kind—and yet at times so terrible! His lips had a quaint smile, twisty and sidewise, which wrinkled his bony face, and made the big nose turn down. His manner was always gentle, even in a fight. His voice had a little stammer and was very soft.

As mother brought him her silver horn filled with mead, he bowed to her. "Dear Lady, if I'm late, please blame the p-p-pig, who wanted to face north-east by south, half west, while the dogs pulled northward. I drink to the Gods, to you, and all your house! Ah! The f-f-fact is I've run away from my wife. She says she can't keep servants because I always k-k-k-kill 'em. And all because I slew a thrall of Snorri's whom I caught stealing. Ah, when my wife Biorg is grieved with the children sq-q-q-uealing! I ran away from home with my wife's Yuletide p-pig, sure of a merry atonement here at Ax Isle."

With that my parents led him to the high seat.

"Ah, by the way," he asked, "have you any dealings of late with—" here Stir made the sign, with fore and little fingers thrusting out, which fends off witches. "with d-d-d-Dame Katla?"

"We had no dealings with Katla of Holt these many years," said Eric.

"My dear Hilda," cried Stir, "that w-w-wicked w-w-woman sucked witchcraft at her mother's breast. She never forgave you for running away with Eric. Are you sure you have no message from her, no dealings with her at all, or presents sent to Holt? I really came to warn you. Have naught to do with Katla. There's peril brewing."

CHAPTER V

ABOUT WITCHCRAFT

SO KATLA the witch of Holt was brewing some plot for our ruin! There was much talk of Katla at our fireside.

This plump, fair, merry little Katla, failing to marry Eric, wedded the farmer at Holt and bore him a son ere he died. Still after all these years would she jest at times on her failure to cut my mother out, or make some laughing threat she would get even. Word reached us of spiteful things she said when she was cross, but nobody minded Katla.

When Stir risked his life to bring us warning, though still we laughed, the joke had a doubtful flavor, and went stale. All of us knew how storms and most dire perils were caused by witches, besides a deal of murder. A danger that one can not fight is terrible.

While Slaying Stir was still our guest at Ax Isle, the new ice came with a black frost, very fine for skating, so he and I went together to see if we could spear a seal or two at the blow-holes. That day he told me all about evil spirits, and how they did inhabit seals and witches. Even our pet seal Humph, whom we had trusted ever so much, became inhabited by a demon who bit one of the twins, and had to be killed. Katla, of course, had demons.

"And so have I," said Stir. He talked most bitterly about his incurable habit of killing people, which so annoyed his wife, and made the neighbors peevish—"whereas," he moaned, "I want to be p-p-p-popular."

I mind me that we speared a seal that day, for mother made the skin into a bag to pull over Katla's head.

Autumn had come again ere Thorgest's timber was finished. Father, just home from his Norway voyage, said he would sell his cargo, then lade the ship with all the timbering for Thorgest, and make delivery at Broadlair haven.

We had a man guesting with us at that time, come to see Eric on business, Alfgeir by name, the skipper and part owner of a Norway ship. With him was one of his seamen, a long Scots gauk called Neil. They were to winter at Mewlithe on the mainland, and had a dinghy with them, but knowing not the skerries or the tides, asked me to be their pilot. At Mewlithe I could easily borrow a pony, and spending a night with Stir upon the way, join with our ship at Broadlair. But mother misliked the venture.

"I know I'm a fool," she said, "yet well I ken that woe shall come of the journey. I see blood flowing. I have had ill dreams. The twins have ring-worm, which is a foul omen."

Father asked, under his breath—

"And if Leif stays at home?"

She shuddered.

"I see unbroken snow above charred timbers here."

"But if Leif goes?"

"Unbroken snow," she wailed, "above black timbers, charred!"

"It makes no odds," said Eric, gloomily, "whether Leif goes or stays, but I would send the lad, because I trust him, to see what mischief Katla is plotting against us."

Then mother roused herself, with that funny little chuckle I always loved to hear.

"If I could scare you, Eric, I'd have my way."

We thought she had only made fun of us.

That evening she sat in the high seat with Eric, and at their feet crouched sleepy Alfgeir, a smooth drowsy man with a brown beard, which he was ever stroking. Mother said it purred. It was only to twit her that Eric told the ship master how mother feared to send me over to Mewlithe, lest I be witch-ridden like Gunnlaug, Thors Bear's son.

"A witch?" asked Alfgeir, yawning drowsily. "An there be witches about I shall not winter at Mewlithe."

Mother yawned also, pretending to stroke a beard, until Eric slapped her. But Alfgeir, smelling a story, must needs be told about Gunnlaug.

So Eric began to show him the whereabouts of the tale.

This western coast of Iceland has two great bights, the Southern being Mane Bay, the Northern Broadfirth. Between these two, there reaches out, full fifty miles into the sea, a headland shaped like the arm of a giant. The mighty fist, nearly a mile in height, is Snow Fell. Along the North shore facing Broadfirth, the notch at the base of the hand is Frodis Water. There dwelt Thors Bear the Bully, who had a wife, and three sons, the youngest son being Gunnlaug the Witch-ridden. The cuff of the giant's sleeve is Buland's Head and, just within, where cuff joins wrist is Mewlithe. There dwelt the Lady Geirrid, her son Arin the Peacemaker and his little child-wife Aud. From Frodis Water along the Wrist to Mewlithe is five miles, and midway was Holt where dwelt the widow Katla and her son.

Mother could bear no more of Eric's prosing, but tapped at Alfgeir's back with the toe of her shoe.

"Oh, cry for me," she said, and yawped at him, "that I've to spend all my life with this dreary bore of a husband! Now I will tell the tale, and Eric, if you tickle I shall bite you.

"Thors Bear the Bully begat Gunnlaug the Prig, who hath a weak chin and a taste for magic. So the young fool walked every day to Mewlithe for lessons in witchcraft at the feet of Geirrid the Bitter. She knows as much of witch-lore as my pigs, but wanted some one to play with and likes 'em young. Oh yes, she ogled the boy and talked bosh.

"Every day, outward and homeward, he had to pass by Holt, where there dwells a wicked little widow by name of Katla. My dear fool Eric loved her until I rescued him—" she sighed—"at my own expense. What Eric saw in Katla I can't imagine. But men are fools, and women love 'em, and—"

"She's a pretty woman," said Eric.

"Was," said mother tartly, "and not so pretty either, as all that. Just fat. She ever ate too much, and worked too little. Moreover, she's a witch."

"Oh, well," quoth father, "so saith Slaying Stir, but—"

"She's a witch," mother insisted. "Say so, or I'll pinch you."

"She's a witch," sighed Eric.

"Now mark you Alfgeir, here's a real truly witch seeing a likely pupil go past her every day for lessons in witchcraft from a silly quack. Here's Katla lonesome as a little widowed spider craving a new husband to eat. Moreover she thinks she's pretty, whereas that cross-patch old thing Geirrid at Mewlithe is black-advised, with a bulging forehead, snub nose, mouth turned down at the corners—aye and a tongue like flame!

"Of course fat Katla had to make eyes

at Gunnlaug. Who wouldn't? Won't he step in? Can't he bide for a bite of dinner? Won't he stay the night on his way home? Grim Geirrid warns the boy to beware of Katla—wants him herself. And the boy's a fool, missing his chances, treating little fat Katla as if she wasn't there. No woman will stand that.

"Katla has a whelp by the name of Odd, a big man of good pith—oh mark you that!—goat-faced, a mighty brawler at horse fights, babbling, slippery and slanderous."

She shuddered, as I do still, at the very thought of Odd Katlason.

"Katla set her son to be young Gunnlaug's dog and walk with him daily to Mewlithe, to loaf about there peeping and spying, to fetch her gossip from Geirrid's house, and above all things lure Gunnlaug in on the way home. Won't Gunnlaug rest at Holt on the long way? Won't he taste the new beer? Mother has made him mittens—won't he come in just to try them on?

"But Geirrid the Bitter had warned him in a deep gruff voice, like that—'Beware of Katla!'

"There's Katla, mad with jealous rage. 'Is't witch lore you go for, Gunnlaug, or to pat the old carline's hand?' The common cat!

" 'Katla,' says Gunnlaug, huffing, 'you're none so young yourself, that you should throw the lady's eld in her teeth.'

" 'So Geirrid's a lady!' she howls after him. 'And I am not! You men think there's no woman like Geirrid, but she's not the only woman who knows things!'

"It was at the onset of last winter that Gunnlaug stayed so late—oh, Geirrid saw to it! Then she begged him to spend the night as her guest at Mewlithe.

" 'Don't you go home,' she pleaded, 'for there'll be many ride-by-nights about—and oft is a fiend in a fair skin!' That's one for Katla, who is flaxen fair.

"And Geirrid has the boy by the heart-strings, wrenching him.

" 'Don't risk it,' she begs him, 'for you're not looking over lucky tonight.'

" 'No fear,' says the fool, for if you dare a man he does things for zest of danger. 'I have Odd Katlason to see me home.'

" 'No gain,' she sneered at him, 'will Odd's help be to you.' And then she bridled, as woman will when thwarted. 'You'll 'een have to pay for your wilfulness.'

"Can't you see? She meant no harm to the lad, she tried to save him. But Gunnlaug, with Odd shambling beside him at a dog-trot, fared homeward in the black dark, until they came to Holt. Katla had gone to bed, and sent out word that Gunnlaug must spend the night there. Odd told her that Gunnlaug must needs fare home.

" 'So his fate shapes,' said Katla, wearied of him at last. 'Let him fare!' "

"Oh, can't you feel the menace?"

In the dusk of the house, with little startled flickers on the hearth and the wind moaning, my mother's words showed that, where Katla slept, a fiend rose out of her body, a foul horrible demon, bat-winged, flapping out through the roof, gliding in stealth down the dark air, while Gunnlaug fled before it across the haggard fells.

"So Gunnlaug came not home to Frodis Water. All the next day the people talked of searching, yet did nothing. Late in the night, Thors Bear looked out from the men's door—and there lay his lost son, gibbering on the threshold, raving mad. Yea, when they had him into bed they found him black and blue, and from his arms and shoulders the flesh was torn off in rags. They say he still lies helpless.

"Now, Alfgeir, who was the witch that had been riding Gunnlaug?"

The skipper looked round with a sort of frightened grin.

"The jealous Katla!"

"By Thor," said Eric, "this Thors Bear had seen his son neglect the farm long months for lessons in witchcraft at the hands of Geirrid. It was Geirrid, not little Katla, who claimed to be a witch.

"Blame not poor Thors Bear, then, that he did gather his people, rode to Mewlithe, and held a Door Doom there,

accusing Geirrid for a ride-by-night. Last spring this case came up for trial at Thorsness."

"Alfgeir," said mother, gibing at this, "you know all weights and measures. How many owls to go to make one jury?"

"Twelve," answered Alfgeir, gravely.

"Peace, or I'll tickle you," said Eric, squeezing her in his arms. "Thors Bear's wife is Thurid, sister to Snorri the Priest, our greatest chief in Broadfirth. He was counsel for Thors Bear against this lady Geirrid."

"Hoots!" said mother, cheerfully. "Geirrid hath Arnkel the Just her brother as counsel of defense, and as a chief he's worth three of little Snorri."

"No matter of that," said Eric, "since the judges ruled both of these priests out of court, as too near of kin to their clients. So Helgi, the very aged priest of Temple Garth, was called upon to speak the jury's finding.

"Arnkel took oath upon the Odin-ring that his sister Geirrid was—"

"A perfect lady," said mother. "What else could the good man say?"

"Then came Geirrid's son, Arin the Peace-maker. He and ten neighbors each with his hand on the sacred ring took oath that the lady Geirrid had naught to do with magic."

"Liars all!" chirped mother.

"Look you," said Eric, "on neither side was any evidence, but the bench of judges was in no mood to have a lady stoned to death. So Thors Bear and Snorri his counsel were put to shame, their case thrown out of court. That they will not forgive."

"Hear my rede," said mother, "Thors Bear the Bully has not finished the case yet until he strikes at poor bitter Geirrid through her coward son Arin."

At mother's bidding I fetched from her bed place the sealskin bag, which she had made when Stir was with us last winter. Now, she said:

"When you shall come to Mewlithe tomorrow evening, give this with my love to Geirrid. Tell her I say that she knows no more about magic than my tom-cat, but if she would catch a truly witch, let her put this over Katla's head."

But father laughed, swearing that if I put the bag over Geirrid's head, he would make me a silver witch to hang upon my necklace for a trophy.

Mother was speaking to Alfgeir, and telling him how Katla had sworn to work our ruin.

"We would like well," she said, "to see Katla's head in a bag, before her plot grows ripe."

TO BE CONTINUED

The Camp-Fire

A free-to-all Meeting-Place *for* Readers, Writers *and* Adventurers

OUR Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit *of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.*

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

SO FAR as I can remember, I have read only one "serious" book in the last eighteen years. If there were any more I can't recall them, so they don't count. Got sort of fed up on "serious" books, not that I ever read too many of them but because they got on my nerves by sounding so wise and so often turning out to be not so wise as they sounded. Also, all of 'em were equally wise and positive when flatly contradicting one another. In the end a fellow has to decide for himself. If he reads only one book on a subject it's likely to bias him on many points. If he reads many on a subject he's likely to get too crammed with other people's thoughts to do much thinking for himself. True, some, like me, have poor memories, but if that would save us from other people's theories it would also lose us the facts the theories were about.

On the whole it looked as sensible for me to give up "serious" reading as to go on with it. If I missed valuable things other people could have told me, I also

missed mistakes other people could have handed on to me. May have been influenced by the fact that on the whole it's easier not to read a serious book than to read it—for me anyway.

I know how disgraceful and shocking such a statement will sound. An editor, of all people, should keep such a skeleton in the closet. But my closet fills up fast enough without my making any effort to add to it and—I'm not yet convinced that my theory is so bad as it undoubtedly seems. Trying to think things out for one's self is a slow path and none too easy a one, but it has its advantages. At least one starts with an open mind and a fair field instead of loading up with hereditary or original mistakes handed on by writers of books.

Hadn't meant to talk so much about myself but wanted to make the case plain so that I could ask "Camp-Fire" whether other comrades have arrived at a similar conclusion, and if so, whether they will give me their reasons. Having "gone it alone" for eighteen years on this little theory, I feel entitled now to desert it long enough to ask opinions from others.

Heaven knows I've heard plenty of condemning opinions. What I want to hear now is supporting opinions, if any.

Or, having taken up this general line of thought, we might broaden the inquiry into something more worth while and hear from "Camp-Fire" on the charge that a chief weakness of modern educational methods is that they cram the youthful mind with facts instead of teaching it how to think. I'll commit myself right off on this question—I'm one of those who think they do. How do you feel about it?

What started me on all this was the following letter from W. E. Dowser, who wants the opinions of "Camp-Fire" comrades on a question of his own. It is pre-eminently a letter from a man with the habit of thinking things out for himself, even if he does now ask for opinions from the rest of us.

As to what he mentions first, the original question put up to "Camp-Fire" years ago, by Edgar Young of our writers' brigade and "A. A.," was "What is the spirit of adventure, biologically considered?" It has since then expanded to include the question of what constitutes adventure.

Kingman, Arizona.

Just a line to say howdy and thanks for all the pleasant hours you have all given me.

Some time ago you asked for a definition of "adventure." Can't think of any definition for it, because to my mind it doesn't exist. How come? Well, the way I see it is this. Adventure is something that happens to the other fellow. When it happens to us personally it's usually just plain hard work or darn hard luck. What do you think about it?

However, this isn't what I wanted to *habla* this time.

But have you ever noticed how when a fellow tried to climb to success how many "friends," etc., tried to hold him back? The old copy-book maxim, "There is plenty of room at the top," may be plumb true. They forgot to add, though, that as soon as a chap got his head up above the crowd that that upper air was a heap full of brick bats, shillalahs and rotten eggs tossed up by the crowd.

If I could only be content with the things I used to enjoy before I got ambitious, I'd be a heap happier and so would lots of others in the same case. Could I be satisfied with a weekly or monthly pay check I'd dodge a lot of gray hairs.

I'm beginning to believe that the many ads of various schools and courses of study offered in magazines are responsible for a heap of wo.

Ambition is a great thing, but do we count the cost? And is material success worth the prize in most cases?

You yourself can supply instance after instance of ambition destroying more than it advances.

No, I'm not a radical. At least I hope not. As I wrote Bill Adams some time ago, I'm just a roughneck with an ambition. And that ambition is nearly realized. But I'm counting the cost of realization and I'm not sure it's worth it.

Don't think that in the course of getting up I've cheated or cut corners or misused my friends; but the costs I mean are passing up of old friendships through loss of mutual interests and self-absorption. And so far I've been unable to cultivate new ones to replace. The boys who used to muck side by side with me still have their same pleasures. But they don't appeal any longer, and the new acquaintances have their pleasures, but they do not and never can interest me.

Now if you can get any sense from this letter, it's more than I can do, but I can't set down any clearer my ideas of the drawbacks to leaving one's own plane and climbing. Still, I suppose if it was to start all over I'd try climbing again. We are made that way, I suppose.

Best wishes to "Camp-Fire."—W. E. Dowser.

ON THE occasion of his first story in the magazine Stewart Robertson rises to introduce himself, and to tell something about the genesis of "Sanctuary."

Several years ago I happened to come down from Quebec on the same train as a captured embezzler. He had managed to get as far north as Lac St. Jean but the nights had gotten the better of him. He had surrendered to the local police, then at the last minute tried to make a getaway. They simply let him run until he was exhausted and then walked leisurely after him, promising that he would be shipped to New York "bien vite". I've never seen a more sorry specimen—he was like a whipped puppy, pathetically eager to curry favor with anyone who would give him a kind word. As to the North Road mentioned in the story, that trail vanishes into the muskeg as you slope down toward Hudson Bay territory. But the rocks on which the trail can be discerned were there long before the muskeg, so *quien sabe?*

I've known north-eastern Quebec all my life. Forty years ago my father stumbled across Lac Moose, a counterpart of Lac Ste. Marguerite, and promptly proceeded to lease it from the Government. Built a real livable log cabin but lost it during a forest fire. The one that replaced it is still there and many a happy summer I've put in far away from the deadly standardization of cities. But that was long ago.

I was born in Montreal. I am of Highland Scottish-Ulster Irish ancestry and was educated by tutors and at the Crichton School at home. Started as office boy in a fire insurance office and got to be cashier. So far, so good. Then too much perusal of a geography started me roaming with the usual decline in fortunes that pursues rolling stones. I've been a day laborer, a foreman on reinforced concrete work, a sign poster, manager of a burlesque show, beachcomber and so on. Have seen most of the world that's worth looking at. Put in over three years with the Canadian Expeditionary Force in France and Belgium, rank at the finish, Sergeant. At present I'm heading back east with the intention of re-establishing myself in the insurance business provided the modern school of efficiency expert haven't taken away all the flavor. Like to play tennis and billiards when I feel polite, at other times boxing and ice hockey fill the bill.

I'd have an awful time remembering dates and places. Travelled quite a lot before leaving Montreal for good in 1911. Europe, Asia and North Africa, West Indies, too. My health since the War hasn't permitted anything very strenuous, but I've kept moving.—STEWART ROBERTSON.

THOSE of you who are in New York and are interested in the work of Rockwell Kent, who illustrated this issue, will be glad to know that there is an exhibition of his paintings at the Wildenstein Galleries, 647 Fifth Avenue, which will last until the middle of this month.

SOMETHING about the Georgians from Harold Lamb, in connection with his long complete novelette in this issue.

I would like to say a word on behalf of the Georgians, for two reasons. History has little record of them, and they are worth knowing.

They are a real people, and form today a small republic in their native mountains, the southern part of the Caucasus. They are one of the oldest of peoples—having lived in the high valleys of the Caucasus between the Black Sea and the Caspian for a matter of some five thousand years. It is not certain where they came from originally. They have always been Georgians—mountaineers, makers and drinkers of wine, herders of sheep, clansmen like the Scots. They are warriors, even today, with traditions extending back to the days when Pompey camped with his legions under their cliffs, and the tide of wild Arabs surged up against them. Indeed, they held the fastnesses of the Caucasus when the great Persian kings were masters of near-Asia.

Rome knew them as the Iberians, and sought their women, who have always been noted for beauty—as have their neighbours, the Circassians. They call themselves—or they did once—Karthlians, and name their country *Gurgistán*, hence our Georgia.

These warrior mountaineers were converted to Christianity about the time of Constantine, and they have been faithful to it for some sixteen hundred years, in spite of Arab and Turk. Isolated, except for the Armenians, from other Christian peoples, they built their own churches in the forests of the Kour, and the valley of Tphilis (our Tiflis). Their one source of contact with the western world was through the Greek empire, and for a long time they served the emperors of Constantinople. The story here is the usual and rather pitiable one of a frontier people ignorant of the decadence of the capital, pawns in the game played by ministers of the empire.

They were not at all like the Armenians, their neighbours on the west. The Georgians were more than willing to fight for their liberty. Early in the twelfth century their boundaries extended beyond Erzerum and Kars—south into the Kohistan of Persia, and as far as Trebizond upon the Black Sea.

Now happened a curious thing. A Syrian bishop told at Rome tales of the splendor of the court and the power of the host of a Christian king far in the East, *Magnificus Rex Indorum* of India and Armenia. To this king he gave the name Prester John, adding that this unknown Christian monarch intended to advance with his host to rescue Jerusalem from the Saracens.

At that time the leader of the Georgian army was the high constable Ivan or John, and undoubtedly

this foe of the Saracens gave rise to the stories of Prester John that flooded Europe when the crusades were launched. To the wonders related of Prester John were added myths of far Cathay and a good deal that was true of the Mongols.

Then came the crusades. But the splendid hosts that mustered in the fields of France and the shores of Italy melted away in the barrens of Palestine; leaders disagreed, cities were conquered and lost. One of the blackest chapters of the crusades is the fate of the Christian Armenians who had looked forward to the coming of the Franks with vast hope, and were bitterly disappointed.

"After more than a century's experience, the Armenians could not trust their Latin neighbours as allies. Haithon (king of Armenia) put his trust in the heathen Mongols, who for half a century were to prove the best friends Armenia ever had"—thus the Cambridge Medieval History, Vol. IV, p. 175.

With the Armenians and Georgians as allies the pagan Mongols broke the Saracens, took Damascus and Aleppo and Bagdad and marched on Jerusalem. But at the first coming of the Mongol horde, the Georgians stood on the defensive, and the impact of Subotai's victorious Mongols upon these unconquered Christians of the Caucasus—the host of the so-called Prester John—forms the story of Rusudan.

Rusudan herself was very much alive at the time of the story. Between the brief lines of the Georgian Chronicle and the annals of the Mongols, we catch an impression of her high courage and beauty. Her restless spirit made no end of trouble for her, but her devotion to her people is unmistakable. Perhaps she was the only woman in the thirteenth century to face the Mongols squarely, on the battlefield and—after the Georgian alliance with the Mongols—in council. Or, for that matter almost the only ruler west of the Gobi who braved them and survived.

Haithon, King of Armenia, followed her example and went to the great Khan to render allegiance.

We wish that more were known about Rusudan. I have sketched the young queen and her people from the very few available facts at hand. Ivan the Constable, like Rusudan, is a famous character of the Caucasus mountain people. "Their annals," says Brosset, the translator of the Georgian Chronicle, "were long and glorious, but lacked a commentator."

TWO liberties have been taken in the story with the main facts of history. Rusudan did not actually become queen until 1223, while the events of the story are some two years earlier; and Theodore Lascaris, whose domain was the coasts of the Black Sea, the Greek Empire, apparently died on the southern coast, not in the Chersonese.

The Chersonese is the modern Crimea. Chersonese means simply "peninsular" and the term "Golden Chersonese" was given more often to the Malay peninsular in the far east. The Crimea was known as the Tauric Chersonese, but was called Altyn or Golden by the Mongols who were struck by the bright yellow sand and clay of its coasts.

The pleasure city of the emperor I have called simply the Chersonese, to avoid confusion in names. It was known by so many in the early centuries—Theodosia, in Roman days, the seat of the Pontic or Sea Kings in the time of Mithradates.

DURING their march to the west, the Mongols sent a detachment south from the Don, across the steppes, through the hills of the Crimea. This detachment made its way direct to the Genoese port as in the story—stormed and sacked it and departed into the steppes again. "It was," says one historian, "the most singular junket in the world."

Obviously, the Mongols started off with the idea of reaching the Chersonese. The historian quoted above—Leon Cahun, *Conservateur* of the Mazarin Library—explains it ingeniously by surmising that the Mongols had a friendly understanding already with the Venetians, and obliged them by dealing a blow at the Genoese and Greeks. But this is surmising a good deal. The Mongols of Genghis Khan were not inclined to trouble themselves about the quarrels of Europe. More likely, they had heard of the riches in the Chersonese—got them a guide and made the raid as in the story.

The Road of the Warriors exists in the Caucasus today, and I have heard it called the Road of the Crusaders. We have no record of any force of crusaders journeying to Palestine by way of the Caucasus. It would be a most difficult and extraordinary route, when easier ones were at hand. But it is very likely that some crusaders filtered back to Constantinople and thence to Europe by way of the Christian Armenians and Georgians. Being the first of their race to appear in the Caucasus the event would have made an impression on the Georgians and the name might have stuck. Today, it is one of the Russian military roads.

In the story of Rusudan I have tried to show the scene at the end of the crusades. The first capture of Jerusalem, the spectacular storming of Acre by Richard of England, the disastrous attempt on Egypt by St. Louis were events well known to us. But the political grasp of the crusading barons on the Holy Land was brief and chaotic. The main purpose of the crusades was never achieved, and failure was written large over all the efforts of the mailed hosts of Europe.

A more vital effect of the crusades was upon the men of Europe, who set out with the Cross sewn upon their shoulders, in high hope and confidence in their leaders, only to experience all manner of hardship and disaster, and to return to Europe with far different ideas. Many, like Sir Hugh chose rather to stay in Asia. Little is known about them, and to understand what they went through, the reader must place himself in unfamiliar scenes and amid strange peoples.

Difficult as it is to follow their fortunes, and the deeds of the Georgians, it seemed worth while to try to tell the story of Sir Hugh, and of the men as they really were—to look, one might say, behind the scenes of the crusades. This is the explanation of "Rusudan."—HAROLD LAMB.

WHAT would you pick as a present to give to the Empress of Abyssinia? We did not know. Neither did Kingsley Moses, who had fought side by side with Abyssinian soldiers. Neither did William Ashley Anderson, who had spent more than a little time at Adis Abeba. Neither did Gordon MacCreagh, who, as head of *Adventure's* Abyssinian Expedition, had to present the gift to the Empress. It took a little trouble to decide upon this detail—one of the dozen that had to be decided upon at the last moment before the expedition left New York—and we are rather anxious to learn how well the imperial lady was pleased with our final choice. We may know at the time you read this, for with luck Mr. MacCreagh's first report will have reached us in the middle of the month. We will pass that report on to you just as quickly as we can put it into print. Look for it in an early summer issue.

DON'T forget that beginning with our next meeting Mr. Cox takes my place as chairman of Camp-Fire sessions. As already explained, he is now in charge of all our departments along with his general work as managing editor.—A. S. H.

WE PRINT below not the usual biography of an author but some comment on critics and their connection with an author's career. You will agree that the case of Gordon Young justifies us for deviating from our custom.

The work of Gordon Young has for me a particular interest. There is among most critics and among those readers who accept as final the dicta of almost any established critic, a cardinal principle of belief to the effect that action stories can have no possible standing with any person of the least literary discernment. As a general principle that is true. The trouble is that these critics and their followers are not sufficiently grounded in literary principles and discernment to recognize exceptions when they occur.

There is, of course, absolutely nothing in action, from Homer through Shakespeare to the present day, that lowers the quality of any literary production by its abundant appearance therein. So long as action arises logically from character and situation there can be no literary objection to its presence, for it is the ultimate expression of psychology, a crystallization of the whole past content of life. "By their acts ye shall know them" applies to characters in fiction just as it applies to the real life good fiction portrays. Indeed, if you will examine the best-known writers of the day you will find that, despite surface cleverness, there are surprizingly many who are unable to give us convincing action of this kind, no matter how mild and anemic the kind of action with which they deal.

Nor is violence of action, even action as violent as that of the Iliad and "Macbeth," in itself unliterary. Drama is no more melodrama than in the days of Euripides. The kind of criticism that can not analyze beyond the mere presence or absence of action, violent or otherwise, and that condemns action *per se* is either decadent or has no knowledge of literature's essentials.

And so it happens that until very recently American critics have found in Gordon Young's work only action and therefore only literary inferiority. The case has particular interest for me not only because he was from the first one of those who seemed unjustly judged on this point but also because he seemed particularly well equipped to make them eat their words sooner or later and to do so quite spectacularly. With action so abundant in his fiction there can be no half-way judgments and very little trimming of sails.

Apparently Mr. Young is about to precipitate the crisis. Even in the beginning the English critics found much more in his work than did our own, and within the last year or two they have become more emphatic in their approval. Several of them definitely raise the point of whether he is not to be the successor of Joseph Conrad and one American review has, I believe, raised the same question. Edwin Bjorkman, of the New York *Evening Post* and Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, one of our soundest critics, discovering Mr. Young, ranks him deliberately and with much enthusiasm as one of America's best: "Stevenson comes naturally to mind as a comparison. But, mere stylistic perfection apart, Stevenson is not in it with Young." His books, always well received in England but published without much fervor of conviction in this country, are now backed by a publisher who believes very thoroughly in Mr. Young's ability and future.

In other words, the corner is turned. From now on critics who, like Mr. Bjorkman, gave him no recognition only because they had not chanced upon his work, will be examining his case and adding their endorsements. After that, of course, all the critics who condemned him as too unladylike for their consideration, will suddenly see the light. I am quite unashamed in my chuckling.

But forget the critics and me when you read "Wastrel." I don't ask you to take my view of the matter, but before you let some of them spoil a good story for you with their sweeping generalization on action in fiction, remember that there are also other critics who consider Mr. Young very much worth while from a literary point of view.—A. S. H.

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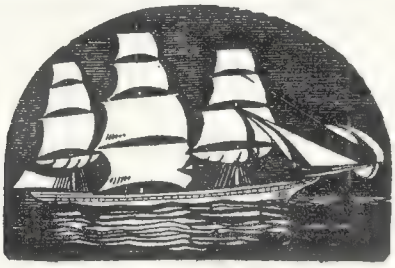


Questions and Answers

Accurate Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere

Books you can Believe

Verdicts by Experts on the Authenticity of Current Non-Fiction

Old Songs that Men have Sung

Collecting and Discussing Old Songs still Living among the People

Indians

WHAT is the use of this curious black stone found farther west than it should be? Who were the original inhabitants of the part of the country in which it was found?

Request:—"Being a collector of Indian relics, am writing you in hope that you can tell me what the curious shaped stone is of which I am enclosing tracings and drawings.*

I found this curious stone in eastern Oklahoma over a year ago and have been trying to find out what it was since, but no one seems to know exactly what it is, at least so far as I can find out.

It is about five inches long, one-half an inch in width and an inch high in the middle, tapering to a point at each end. It is made of black polished stone, is flat on the bottom, and is grooved at each end.

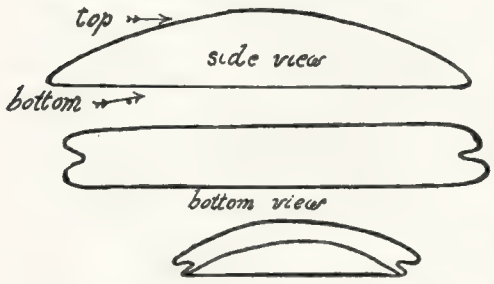
Would also like to know what tribe of Indians were the original inhabitants of North Texas, also what tribe originally lived in what is now east central Oklahoma, in what is called the Kiamichi Valley."—LESTER WILSON, Wylie, Texas.

*See next page.

Reply, by Mr. Woodward:—The curious black stone object is more than likely one of those baffling items known simply as "boat stones," taking their name from their shape, use unknown. They fall into the ceremonial type of artifacts or possibly the ornamental. They are found over a wide range of country although it seems rather odd that one should be found in Oklahoma, as that is a trifle too far to the west for such objects, most of them being found in the East and Middle West, also Southern States. Get hold of W. K. Moorehead's "North America in the Stone Age," 2 vols., and see the various types of ornaments, tools, etc., depicted in those volumes.

Who were the "original inhabitants of northern Texas?" Don't know exactly as there has been quite a shifting of population both in pre-Columbian and our historic period. During the early part of the 18th century when more became known about the nothern part of Texas through Spanish and French explorations, a group of tribes then known as the Jumano (to the Spanish) Paniquet or Panis (French) now termed by ethnologists the Wichitas of Caddoan stock were living on the upper reaches of the Red, Brazos and Trinity Rivers. The Taovayas and Wichita lived almost exclusively on the

upper Brazos, Wichita and Red Rivers; southeast of these tribes were the Yscanis, Kichai and Tawakoni. The Wichita were a warlike, wandering people and are said to have practised cannibalism.



Tribes of the Caddoan stock and also Siouan peoples inhabited the territory now the State of Oklahoma. Exact tribal boundaries of pre-Columbian times are hard to determine in most cases. If you wish to get a good idea of Texas Indians in the early days, their distribution, customs, etc. (not so much detail of customs) read "Athanase de Mezieres and the Louisiana-Texas Frontier, 1768-1780," by Herbert Eugene Bolton, 2 vols. Arthur H. Clark Co., Cleveland, 1914. You may find it in the nearest large library.

U. S. Marines

CHANCES for adventure and free correspondence courses are among the inducements held out to the prospective soldier of the sea. Not to mention the satisfaction of belonging to an outfit with a reputation.

Request:—"I am thinking about going into the Marines and I would like you to answer these questions.

1. How old do you have to be?
2. What is the pay?
3. How much do you have to weigh?
4. Where is the best place to join?
5. How long are you on duty?
6. If there is any further information regarding this project would you kindly state it, as I wish to join in the spring."—B. M., Nelsonville, O.

Reply, by Lieut. Hopkins:—A reply to your questions about the U. S. Marine Corps:

1. All men accepted for enlistment in the U. S. Marine Corps must be 21 years of age. Men from 18 to 21 may be accepted if they present birth certificate or affidavit, and the written consent of both parents. Younger men also may enlist to learn the drum and trumpet.

2. The pay of a private is $21.00 per month. All first enlistments must be in that grade. There is an additional allowance amounting to about $6.00 a month for clothing. Messmen and many special duty men such as chauffeurs, mechanics, clerks, draw extra pay, from $5.00 a month up. Enlistments are for four years.

3. Height requirements, 64 inches to 74 inches. Weight: Minimum, 128 pounds at 64 inches height. As a general rule, a man should have two pounds to each additional inch. Waivers on underweight can be allowed in certain cases. A man must have good color perception, and eyes perfect, or nearly so corrected by glasses. Teeth must be good. Many minor defects a man may have will not disqualify him if they do not trouble him and if the doctor believes they will not develop. The examination is very strict but is not intended to be impossible to pass, of course.

4. Length of time on duty is difficult to say. Some posts have a schedule of four hours on watch and eight off, every other day; some are easier and some more difficult. Conditions vary in the same post from time to time, due to many things. After a number of years as an enlisted man, I freely say that, normally, the duty is not difficult nor arduous—although it is no lazy man's life. You may be sure that you will be busy plenty of the time, and in return you will have generous allowances of liberty when off duty, plenty of recreation and a certain amount of adventure if you are fortunate and a good soldier. You can make your life happy and colorful in the Marines if you desire, but I think it is harder to be a good Marine than it is to be a good civilian, and therefore more interesting and worth trying. At the end of four years, with an honorable discharge and a clean record, a man has something of value and pride to remember. You may take free correspondence courses in the Marine Corps Institute under competent instructors, whose certificate of graduation is endorsed and of as great value as that of the International Correspondence School, of which it is (or was) an associate.

Write to U. S. Marine Corps, P.O. Bldg., Cincinnati, Ohio, or to U. S. Marine Corps, Federal Bldg., Cleveland, Ohio.

Maryland

A TRIP by auto that will take in many scenes and spots memorable in American history, beginning with a battlefield in Pennsylvania.

Request:—"I am intending to take a trip next summer through Southern Pennslyvania and Maryland—a motor trip—and I would like to know of some good place to stop. I mean some of your important historical places. I intend to go into Kentucky, also Virginia. Would like to see the Luray Caverns. Would like to know how to get there."—CARL E. WEIMER, Jermyn, Pa.

Reply, by Mr. Allen:—I am sure you will enjoy a motor trip through Maryland and some of the adjoining states this summer. Here's hoping that you will include Washington in your trip.

Although you did not say which route you intend to follow, I suppose you will go from Jermyn to Wilkes-Barre, then to Sunbury and on to Harrisburg, where you can give the Capitol the "once-over" and take in the scenery along the River Boulevard. Then after you get that far you can go east to Lancaster, then down to York, and hit Gettysburg, scene of decisive battle of the Civil War.

All of which you will find interesting—a monument marks "High Tide of Confederacy" there, and posts mark every position. Then from Gettysburg, on to Frederick, Md., site of Barbara Frietchie's home and Mt. Olivet Cemetery, where rests the remains of Francis Scott Key.

From Frederick to Harper's Ferry, Va., scene of John Brown's last stand—from there into Winchester, historic Virginia—and the Shenandoah Valley—from Winchester, down the Shenandoah Valley Pike, to Middletown—then a little east to Cedarville, then Riverton, Front Royal, to Flint Hill, Washington, Va., Sperryville, then west by way of Thornton Gap to Luray Caverns. This is the best route, though it is a little longer, than by way of Bentonville from Front Royal to Luray.

Then if you follow the road west from Luray, you will come to the Shenandoah Highway, and by going south you will come to the Endless Caverns—then on to Stanton, then west again, and take in the Virginia Hot Springs, then White Sulphur Springs, W. Va., Charleston, Huntington, then Ashland, Ky., and still further west if you wish to go—because once really in Kentucky you'll find more things you can give the "once-over."

Though I think you'll say you've had enough after you tour through southern Pennsylvania, Maryland and down to Luray—think so? If you do go as far as Kentucky, why not go on from Ashland to Louisville, in time, if possible, to see the race classic of America, the Kentucky Derby?

I think this takes in all that you wanted to know except maps and for maps, really good, authentic, and easy to follow, write to the American Automobile Association, National Headquarters, Washington, D. C., and to the Standard Oil Co., 26 Broadway, New York City, for the little booklet they publish called "Know Your Own State."

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine. All questions on actual travel should be addressed to "Adventure's Travel Association," care *Adventure*, not to this department. All questions, however, on equipment (except ordinary travel equipment) should be addressed to this department, not to "Straight Goods."

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

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GEORGE ROGERS CLARK. HIS LIFE AND PUBLIC SERVICE, by Temple Bodley. Houghton Mifflin Co., 23 chapters, Afterword and Appendix. Map. Portrait of Clark. Index.—This biography is heavily documented and not only gives the life of Clark from childhood to his death but covers, insofar as Clark is concerned, the history of Western development up to the close of the 18th century. The writer justly stresses the importance of Clark's labors to eliminate British influence west of the Allegheny mountains, during and following the Revolutionary War. All the more familiar passages in Clark's heroic efforts are given in detail, and much that is new to the occasional reader of history. Faults, if any, are in the arrangement of a vast amount of material. The writer has made an exhaustive study of the subject. It is a worthwhile contribution to the many biographies now published.—HUGH PENDEXTER.

WAR BIRDS. Anonymous; illustrated by Captain Clayton Knight, United States Air Service, A. E. F.; published in book form by George H. Doran Co.—WAR BIRDS is the true diary of a man who enlisted in the United States Air Service at the outbreak of the World War as a Flying Cadet; sailed with one of the first contingents and was trained at the various British flying schools in England. From the heartbreaking eight months of flying training the story suddenly jumps to the life of a fighting air squadron on the Western Front. Every combat, crash, fear, revelry and mad exultation of those never to be forgotten days is portrayed in a manner that leaves the reader, especially one who has been through it all, shaken and breathless to the very last word. Each word, scene, and action is absolutely true and can be proved so by official records and affidavits of well known officers who were members of the author's squadron.—W. G. SCHAUFFLER, JR.

SOME WESTERN FISHING, by W. W. Crosby. Williams and Wilkins, Baltimore, Md.—An excellent work for the angler to read who contemplates western fishing. It covers most of the famed waters from Colorado, California, Montana to the Canadian Pacific Rockies. One may say that it is a purely local work insofar that it offers in a unique manner advice on waters the writer has actually fished. Instead of indulging in theory and controversy over the best methods of taking various sorts of game fish, through very readable narrative of his own experiences the writer hints that what served him well ought serve the other fellow. In addaddition to fishing, he imparts considerable information concerning what visitors may expect at different well-frequented resorts. Knowing the innumerable local names applied to fish, the writer has appended a sort of breviary which will help unravel many enigmas of this sort for the man who is entering into a new field of angling, for him, in the West and Northwest.—"OZARK RIPLEY."

RANCHING WITH ROOSEVELT, by A. Companion Rancher, Lincoln A. Lang. J. B. Lippincott Company.—An absorbing story of personal experiences as a cattleman in the Bad Lands of North Dakota during the '80s. Though Theodore Roosevelt, the enthusiastic young ranchman, figures prominently, he by no means overshadows the many other characters of that new and strangely fascinating country who are vigorously portrayed. Amusing anecdotes abound and there is much vivid description of the Bad Lands and out-of-the-way information concerning ranching, hunting, and the life of the range. The volume is well illustrated with photographs of scenes of forty years ago.—JOSEPH MILLS HANSON.

FOUR YEARS BENEATH THE CRESCENT. By Rafael de Nogales. Scribner.—War veterans will be keenly interested in this complete, impartial, close-up story of Turkey's part in the Great War, told by a South American soldier of fortune, himself a high Turkish officer. Fiery, highly educated, the spirit of adventure had drawn this Venezuelan of noble Spanish and Indian blood into the Spanish-American War; Mexico; Manchuria; to Nevada for silver and Alaska for gold. Refused admission into the regular armies of the Allies in 1915, he was welcomed by the Turco-German High Command, who hoped by his fire to overcome the inertia of the East. He saw the terrible Armenian massacres and deportations and gives the world a new view of them. He gives intimate character-sketches of Turkish and German leaders. An excellent book, sincere and reliable.—J. F. EDWARDS.

"Old Songs that Men Have Sung" appears in alternate issues.

Lost Trails

We offer this service free of charge to readers who wish to get in touch with old friends from whom the years have separated them. All inquiries of this sort received by us, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with the inquirer's name. We reserve the right, in case the inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any number or other name, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and in general to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. For the benefit of the friend you seek, give your own name when possible. Give also your own full address. We will forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal Star to give additional publicity in their "Missing Relative Column" weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred. Full lists of those unfound are reprinted semiannually. Whenever practicable inquiries will be repeated in newspapers in the town in which the person inquired for was last seen.

W. J. S.—Address all mail either to address on postal card or to General Delivery, Brooklyn, N. Y. No one to see it if you send it to home address. So don't worry.—E. D.

GANTZ or JANTZ, JOSEPH A.—Has not been heard from since July, 1924. His parents would like any information concerning him.—MR. and MRS. N. JANTZ, Baltimore, Md.

WILOW, M.—Please write your sister. Have good news. —B. BETSY, Gen. Del., San Diego, Cal.

BAILEY, HENRY A. "Big Hank"—Last heard from bound for Montana, spring of 1926. Present address desired.—Write to CARL J. MOULTON, Box 183, Yampa, Colo.

DUNKEL, FRANK—About 50 years old, a former New York State resident. Your sister and niece want to hear from you. Won't you let us make you happy. Financial aid will be gladly given. Your whereabouts will be kept secret.—Write to A. B. C, care *Adventure*.

BLOOMENTHAL, JAMES—Of Harrisburg, Pa., and last heard of in New Orleans, La. Please communicate with H. E. BARTH, Box 58, Schofield P. O. Hawaii.

IRONS, MRS. WILLIA—Last heard of in Great Falls Mont., year 1923. Supposed to be in Western Oregon. If you see this please write to your old friend or anyone who can give me her address.—MRS. WILLIAM ROWEN, Box 84, Ione, Wash.

CASEY, JAMES B.—Dad died, left property, awaiting your presence to be settled. Write WILFRED CASEY, 5051 Brooklyn Avenue, Detroit, Michigan.

RUBEN, SHAFFER (Shocky)—Would like to hear from him. Last heard of aboard S.S. *Cantigny* in 1920. Write his old friend L. F. KENNEDY, 1909 Ave. N½, Galveston, Tex.

HENNESSEY, EDWARD—About 50 years old. Left Ballyann, Co. Wexford, about 1898, with Jennie Lee of Rosegarland. Poor or rich write your sister.—ANNE HENNESSEY FRAIN, 177 Pavonia Avenue, Jersey City, N. J.

DALEY, JOHN—Born in Manchester, New Hamp. Have not seen him for seventeen years. Last heard from, he was married in the west. Brother—DENIS DALEY, 145 Granite St., Manchester, New Hampshire.

STRAIN or FAIRLEY, MRS. JANE—Last heard of about 25 years ago, staying in St. Main Street, Montreal. Brother David inquires.—DAVID FAIRLEY, 5-12 Street, Cardenden, Fife, Scotland.

HULL, HARRY H.—Last heard of at small town in B. C. Canada. About 43 years old. Light brown hair, blue eyes, 5 ft. 8 in., weight 170 to 180 lbs. Rather quiet, well read. Father—Reward for information.—A. N. HULL, 1331 Maple Ave., Santa Ana, Calif.

C. V. G.—Daddy darling. Please get in touch with me at the old Boulevard address. Good news and you must know it. We are lonesome for you. Come home if possible.—JANE.

FARSON—Would like to hear from relatives or descendants who have information or bear this name. Family originated from Pittsburg, Pa., were known to have resided there in 1870. Pension claim depends in locating relatives.—MRS. L. COLLINS, 1626 No. Harvard Blvd., Hollywood, Calif.

BUBEL, HERMAN—Former address Lorenzos St., Rochester, N. Y. His old pard in Northern Ontario would like to get in touch with him again.—J. T. BULMER, Box 61 R R A. Montesano, Washington.

GRIFFEN, ALLIE—She was christened Allie Henriette Bittoklite and married George Griffin. She has been gone five or six years. She was a chorus girl with the "Uncle Sam's Belles" in 1916, or before that. Dark brown hair, hazel eyes, 5 ft. 2 in. About 35 years old. Stage name Alice Burns, later Patricia Douglas, nickname "Tiny." May have been in Seattle, San Francisco, Chicago or New Jersey. Bobby and sister want to hear from you.—SISTER DOLLY.

DAWDY, CHARLES HUDSON—My dear you have been away so long, why don't you write to Mother and Father and do come home. His trade is telegraph operator, blue eyes and fair, around 30 years of age.—Mother MRS. HARMON DAWDY, 145 Greenston St., St. Catherines, Ont., Canada.

GERLACH, MINNIE—Please communicate with me at once; you are wanted badly.—KATHRYN GERLACH SWANEY, 346 Alvardo Avenue, Pomona, Calif.

LINDSAY, THOMAS—I wish to find my uncle. Last heard from in Hamilton, Canada in 1913. He was an old soldier, a native of Scotland, and might have been to the World War. Any information will be appreciated.—MRS. INA LINDSAY GARNSEY, Star Route, Clayton, New York.

THE following have been inquired for in either the February 15 or the March 15, 1927 issues of *Adventure*. They can get the names and addresses of the inquirer from this magazine.

A. D. I.; Ashley, Earnest William; Carter, Iola; Cass, Michael; Cooley, Capt. C. O.; Crosby, Fred; Donley, Richard Paul; Donnelly, Thomas F.; Doyle, John; Dudley, Charles W.; E. W. B.; Fanning, Daniel; Fay, Harry; Graham, Albert Edwin "Buck"; Halton, Fred J.; Harnett Fred; Harris, Margaret (nee Reedy); Harrold, Arthur; Hohensinner, Frank L.; Holl, Gerald Francis; Imlay, John; Johnson, Stanley C.; Jones, John P.; Klohk, Sasha; Kohl Bob "Pop"; Lamson, Willis; Mack William; Moore or More, Curtis; Newton, Othie; O'Harra, Terence; Piner, Jack; Roemer and Armstrong, Nellie; Sass, Henry; Sharpe, Cecil; Sklerar, William; Stade, Harold W.; Spraks, William B.; Stalker, William Moodie; Taune, Albert or Dallas; Will all who served with the 54th Art. C. A. C. either in the U. S. or in France; Would like to hear from any of the fellows who were in Co. M. 19th Inf. 1918. Galveston Camp Travis.

UNCLAIMED MANUSCRIPTS

Aber, Loureine A.; Bieker, Mrs. Berna; Bea M. B.; Blood, Mrs. Elsie; Blake, E. G.; Bront, J.; Brotherson, Graham P.; Cole, John; Cunningham, Arthur; Chittenden, Daniel; Cook, Clyde C.; Chlemens, Marc F.; Dawson, Robert; Elgy; Foster, Olive Hyde; Gray, Laban; Grafton, H. L.; Haddix, Hal; Halliday, Stephen; Heavener, Carl R.; Letton-Dow, Ann; Mann, Owen; Price, Bertha M.; Rockwood, T. K.; Rhodes, Carlyle; Soogee, Will; Strauch, Hugo; Sturges, Effingham McKay; South Roy; Tyler, Bruce; Tidey, Sydney; Wetzel, Lewis; Wright, A. L.

UNCLAIMED MAIL

Buckner, W. B.; Donaldson, J. R.; Hooper, A. R.; Lekki, Michael; Lemley, W. H.; Minor, John; Moore, Ted; North, A. P.; Samson, W. P.; Ward, Frank B.; Williams, Edward; Yore, Clem; Talbot, Mrs. J. L.

The Trail *Ahead*

The next issue of ADVENTURE, *May 15th*

Two *Complete Novelettes:*

The Valley of Lost Herds

By W. C. Tuttle

Long ago, when the two were young and new to the ranch lands, they had been close friends, had shared the same bunk together. Now *Park Reber* was a great cattle baron, supreme in all the Tomahawk country, and *"Buck" Priest* was the last of the small cattlemen to hold out against *Reber's* money. The country was big enough to hold both of them, men thought; but they were forgetful of the steady trickle of disappearing stock that was slowly breaking *Buck Priest.*

When the Silence Spoke

By William Ashley Anderson

Daily the world expected to hear that Verdun had fallen; Gallipoli had proved a failure; and the Mesopotamian campaign was a terrible mess. In East Africa the Germans hung on exasperatingly. What might be expected if the half million or so of brilliant Abyssinian soldiery should be inflamed by the conquering lust of Islam? Thus the stage was set when the mysterious woman, *El Fetna,* appeared.

Part Three of Wastrel

Gordon Young's New Serial of *Dan McGuire in the South Seas*

Part Two of A New Found World

A Novel *of Leif Ericson* by Roger Pocock

The Mystery of Mergui

By S. B. H. Hurst

For only three men in Lower Burma did the name of the drunken degenerate have any significance. The fat, bland, philosophical Chinese of course remembered, for he had fed him opium and liquor. *Father Murphy,* the big Catholic missionary, too, for had he not posted the man's last letter? But what of the dirty little man with the monocle, who had never so much as glimpsed the person?

And—*Other Good Stories*

Fight, by Robert Carse, *a sailor who knew the heroes of old;* Don Manuel's Sons, by Clements Ripley, *brothers only by heritage;* Bug Eye Neerly Starves, by Alan LeMay, *letters of a wandering partner;* Baron Trenck, by Post Sargent, *another of the* Goodly Company of Adventurers.

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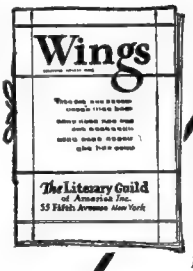

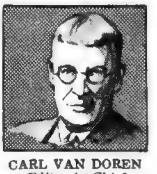

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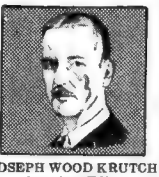
Associate Editor



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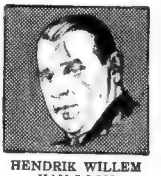

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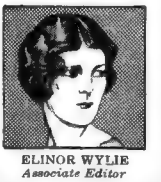

ELINOR WYLIE
Associate Editor

Some Early Subscribers

The public is enthusiastic. We cannot give you here a list of the names of the subscribers who have joined. Here are a few among the first.

Theodore Dreiser, Novelist, Author "An American Tragedy"
Louis Marshall, Corporation Lawyer
Dean Ray of the Church of the Transfiguration of N. Y.
George Foster Peabody, Philanthropist
George Vincent, President, Rockefeller Foundation
Florence C. Floore, Retiring Treasurer, General Federation of Women's Clubs
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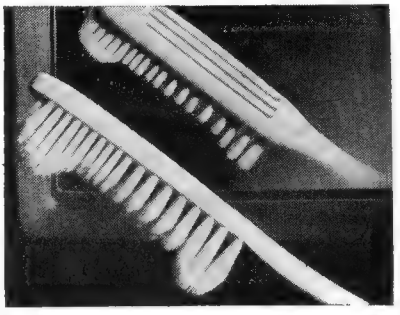

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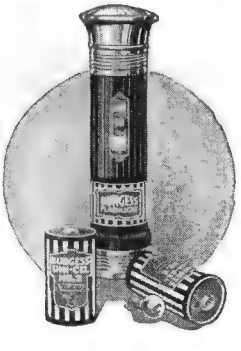

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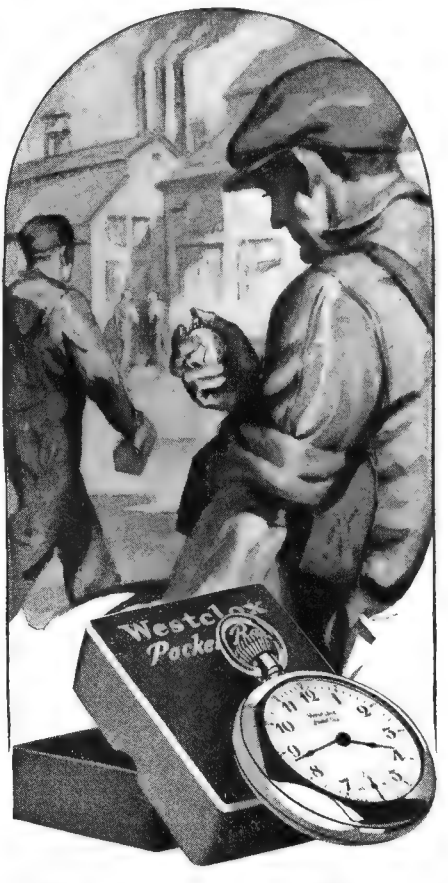

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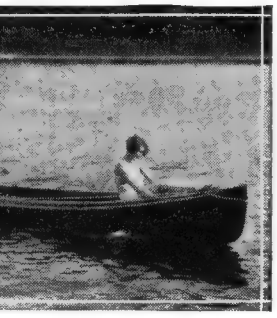

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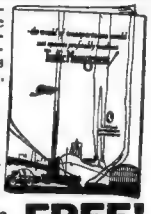

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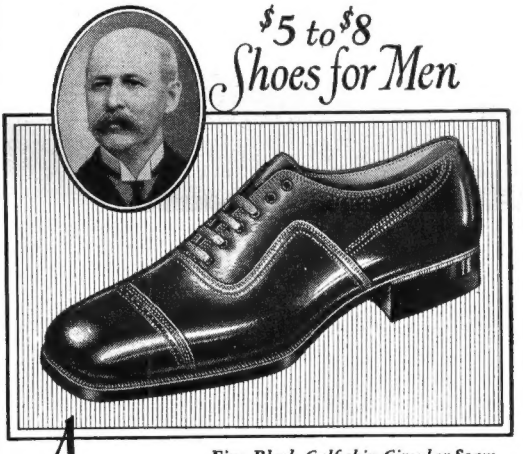

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NONE DARED TELL SECRET

Some believe that he was a twin or even elder brother of Louis XIV, a true heir to the crown hidden from the time of his birth. Others think that he was the eldest illegitimate son of Charles II; or that he, and not Louis XIII, was the actual father of Louis XIV. Some have thought that he was the son of Buckingham and the Queen of France; others, that he was the son of Louis XIV and De la Vallière. To have revealed it would have cost anyone his life. The regent admitted when drunk that the prisoner was a son of Anne of Austria and Mazarin. Louis XV refused to tell Madame de Pompadour. Madame Campan stated that Louis XVI did not know the secret. De Chamillart on his deathbed declined to reveal the secret.

MASKED—HIS FACE HIS SECRET

In 1669 there was hurried across France a masked man whose identity was shrouded in mystery. Never has a prisoner been guarded with such vigilance and with such fear of his story becoming known. He was taken to an island prison where the governor carried his food to him; a confessor saw him once a year, but no other visitor ever laid eyes on him. *He was always masked—his face alone would tell his secret.*

He was well treated; supplied with fine clothing, books, and served from silver dishes. The governor stood before him uncovered, and addressed him as *Mon prince.* When the prisoner wrote messages on his white linen he was supplied only with black.

He is not a myth, as is proven by letters between Louvois, the minister, and Saint-Mars, the governor of the prison. These are all written in veiled language; never once is he given a name. No letter mentions his crime or whether he had committed one.

SECRET EVEN AFTER DEATH

This horrible punishment ended when, in 1703, the most mysterious of all prisoners died and was buried in the dead of night, under a false name, and given a false age.

His cell was carefully painted so that any message he might have written would be covered up, and everything he used was destroyed lest any clew might be left. Thus vanished a man whose name and identity was unknown even to his gaoler—some think even to the prisoner himself.

WHY WAS HIS LIFE PRESERVED?

What was the reason for all this secrecy? What crime, if any, did this man, evidently of exalted rank, commit that he should be buried alive for life? Why did the king preserve the life of this prisoner? Why did he not have him put to death? The subject becomes more mysterious as we investigate.

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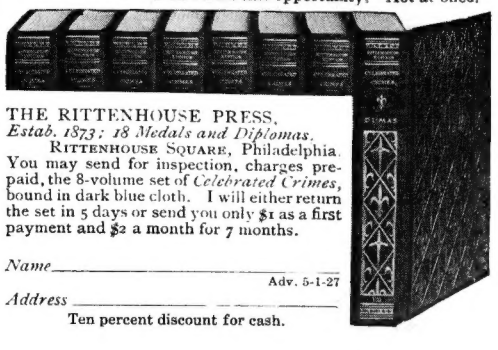

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